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ROSEMARY

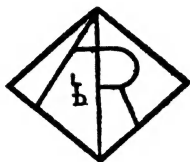
ROSEMARY

SOME REMEMBRANCES

By

FAY COMPTON

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
COMPTON MACKENZIE



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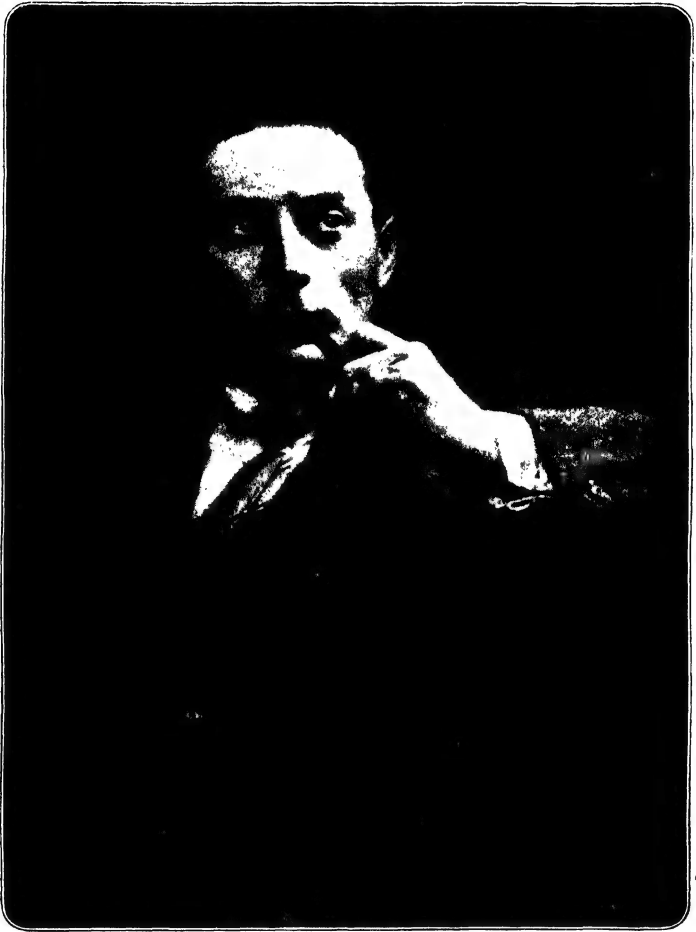


Photo by]

COMPTON MACKENZIE

[J. R. Brinkley

INTRODUCTION

I have always been painfully embarrassed by the task of introducing to readers even a dead author, and I should like to make it clear from the outset that I feel uncomfortably self-conscious in writing this preface to a sister's book. My pen is but a slow and crabbed workman in the easiest circumstances. It seldom has a swifter fluency than 'tears still'd from the eyes of the flinty Destinies'; but now it is more than usually intractable, and I find myself growing rapidly backward to the state of mind of a schoolboy who has been condemned by fortune's malice to present his 'kiddy sister' to a dozen cold and critical associates. I am unable to recall at this moment one relation near or distant that did not seem in those days to cry to Heaven for an apology. Why was the young male always so bashful about his kinsfolk? The young female had none of this shamefulness. I have seen the most preposterous brothers and aunts dragged into the arena

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of a breaking-up day at a girl's school, there to be exhibited not as the draggle-tailed martyrs they resembled, but defiantly, nay, proudly, as if in sooth they were lions. When I say, therefore, that my first impulse is to apologize for this autobiography, I hope that I may be understood as apologizing in a Pickwickian and fraternal sense.

Some thirty odd years ago my father produced a dramatized version of *A Tale of Two Cities* as one of the plays with which every winter he was accustomed to supplement his repertory. My brother, my eldest sister and myself, were touring with him during the Christmas holidays; and it was decided that the part of the little St. Evremonde in the prologue should be taken for a few weeks by my sister Viola, a decision which caused the gravest anxiety to her brothers, who having devoted much attention to curing her of all affectation and self-esteem dreaded the intoxicating effect of this public appearance on her character. It was not a long part. Indeed the solitary line was, 'Yes, I will, mother,' spoken as a promise to the Marquise that

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he would remember something when he grew up—perhaps to be good. The author, T. Edgar Pemberton, was staying in Norwich for the production, and my father suggested—or perhaps it was Pemberton himself, for he was the kindest of men—that my brother and myself should accompany him to the first performance and enjoy it in his company. My father, who for an actor had a most unusual respect for authors, impressed upon us the solemnity of the occasion, for which I regret to say we prepared ourselves by taking advantage of our governess's early departure to the theatre to smoke rapidly through a packet of *Guinea Gold* cigarettes that we had discovered in an empty drawer, the property doubtless of the landlady's husband or son. I was about nine, my brother seven, my sister just six. It had been snowing all day, and it was still snowing when the time came to set out with the author. Exhilarated by the cigarettes we were inclined to dally on the way in order to throw snowballs at any enthusiastic playgoers who had ventured forth on this bitter night; but at

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laßt Pemberton persuaded us to enter the theatre and sit one on either side of him in the front row of the circle. Our sister was not long in making her entrance dressed in sky-blue velvet. We stirred uneasily and glanced at one another across the author, who no doubt in the manner of authors was counting the conjunctions altered or omitted by the players. At last came the speech of the Marquise, '*And you, little Charles, will you, when you are,*' etc., etc. There was a moment's silence at the end of it, and then through the theatre rang out the most prodigious voice from a six-year-old child ever likely to be heard by a Norwich audience: '*Yes, I will, Mother.*' It was altogether too much for the little girl's brothers, who scandalized the house by breaking into peal upon peal of laughter. Oh, how we laughed! We prodded each other across the author. We thumped his knees. We clung to him in a helpless ecstasy of mirth. We slid from our seats to the floor, and there gasped and rolled in convulsions of delight. Members of the audience stood

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up and said 'Hush,' glaring indignantly at poor dear Pemberton, who implored us to pull ourselves together, to which entreaty we responded with more vociferous laughter. Finally an attendant came down the gangway and insisted that Pemberton should take us out into the lobby, out of the theatre entirely indeed unless he could guarantee our better behaviour. The author blushing with embarrassment led us, or rather dragged us up the gangway still laughing, and then for the rest of the prologue he walked us up and down the lobby still laughing; but by this time he was laughing himself as unrestrainedly as we were, oblivious of the attendants who kept coming on tiptoe through the swing-doors to shake warning fingers at our antics. The curtain had risen on Dr. Manette's garden in Soho before we were in a fit condition to take our seats in the circle again.

I am glad to say that the first time I saw my sister Fay perform in a theatre I did not surrender to such outrageous mirth. As a matter of fact she was performing in a play

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of my own, which was a solemn business for the author even if, as in this case, the play was intended to make an audience laugh. It was a skit of what we should nowadays call 'highbrow' drama—at that date the epithet had not crossed the Atlantic—and Fay had just joined the Follies. She has told how that happened, and there may be a trifling interest in the tale of how I came to be in a position to bring her to Pélissier's notice.

By the summer of 1910 I had grown tired of wrapping up the typescript of my first novel and posting it to publishers. I never had much belief in the book that was too good to be published or the play that was too clever to be acted, and I had vowed not to begin another novel until my first work lay on my desk printed and bound. Two years of hunting for a publisher had made it imperative to hunt for money. The opportunity presented itself to take a part in the production of Sir Hall Caine's play *The Bishop's Son* at the Garrick Theatre. I stipulated for a salary of ten pounds a week, with half a hope that this sum would

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be refused and so give me a chance of backing out. Rather to my dismay I was engaged, but the appearance of Martin Secker with an offer to publish *The Passionate Elopement* in the new year came as an omen that I should not be finally doomed to the intolerable boredom of acting for a livelihood. Six nights, hag-ridden all the time by acute influenza, I dressed myself up to represent a half-drowned priest flung ashore on the coast of Man for the purpose of giving absolution to Bransby Williams ; and then the run of the play came to a sudden end. Yet that failure brought me great luck, for just when I was coming to the end of the ten pounds I had earned, Shiel Barry, who had shared a dressing-room with me, telegraphed to say that Pélissier wanted to see me about some lyrics he required for a revue which he had contracted to produce at the Alhambra before Christmas, and in which Shiel Barry himself was to play the lead. He had talked a great deal about Pélissier in the dressing-room and vowed that he was going to suggest me for the job ; but I had never

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really thought anything would come of it. I had heard such promises before. However, Shiel Barry had been as good as his word. I was bidden to the Apollo on a Saturday night sometime at the end of September. It happened that I had a very bad sore throat and could hardly speak, but I made the best of it, and went off for a drink at Verrey's with Pélissier, Morris Harvey, and Dan Everard. After some small talk Pélissier gazed at me with those great eyes of his like violet saucers and said abruptly, 'I suppose you understand that I shall want all those lyrics by Monday night?' 'Of course,' I agreed as airily as my throat would allow. 'Then you'd better come back with us to Finchley now.' I divined that if I were to make any excuse about the pain I was in or even to hesitate one instant Pélissier would take no more interest in me and that my chance of writing lyrics for him would vanish for ever. So off we went to Finchley. In Pélissier's dining-room an immense cold supper was waiting with places laid for at least a dozen people. This was the Finchley

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use, and if I call that supper Gargantuan I am not using a trite epithet, because since Gargantua himself there was never any man who was so much Gargantua as Pélissier was. Not that he ever saw himself in the pages of Rabelais. 'Do *you* think Rabelais funny?' he once asked me, and I knew by the contemptuous pouting of his lips that he did not, in spite of the luxurious edition of him he would have bought. Indeed except over some of Dickens our literary tastes seldom coincided. I remember his losing his temper with me because I would not admit that *The Dop Doctor* was a supremely great book. Pélissier loved it and must have presented three or four dozen copies of it to different people. After supper, at which the host himself carved with a tremendous gusto, and which I had to pretend to enjoy, though every mouthful was an agony to swallow, we adjourned to a room that seemed full of grand pianos. 'Now this is the idea of the revue.' The author or inventor gave a muddled account of his conception. 'And this is the first song.' We wrestled with

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rhythms until five or six o'clock of Sunday morning, when I was allowed to go to bed. At half-past eight Pélissier's face rose like a sun above the foot of my bed. He was wrapped in a brilliantly-coloured dressing-gown. 'Aren't you up *yet*?' he exclaimed. 'Look here, come into my room, I've got a new tune.' I followed him, and found another piano at the foot of his bed. All that Sunday, interrupted by gigantic meals, games, and quantities of visitors we talked about the revue. In the evening after a colossal supper I insisted on being sent back to the seclusion of Church Row, Hampstead, to work at the lyrics. Pélissier, when he took a fancy to anybody, wanted him or her round him all the time, and having apparently taken a fancy to me he was most unwilling to let me go. 'Never mind about this damned revue. Go on talking. I like to hear you talk. You interest me.' But I was determined he should have those lyrics the following evening if I offended him by going off to work when he wanted me to talk to him; and the following evening he did have

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them. After that he demanded my company all the time. The first thing Pélissier always did when he made a new friend was to present him or her with a wrist watch. So on Tuesday when of course I had to lunch with him, the wrist watch was bought. One of his traits was to be prodigally generous over presents and hospitality, but not very extravagant in his payment for work done. This attitude was not due in the least to meanness, but to his deeply felt conviction that everybody round him—the other Follies, the men who wrote his words, even Hermann Finck who by putting his tunes into musical shape was indispensable, were really contributing nothing. No man was ever more aware of his own creativeness than Pélissier. ‘What does Hermann do? Nothing. It’s the tune that counts.’ Yet even Pélissier had to admit that *In the Shadows* was a good tune, though he did his best to spoil it by making me write some idiotic words to it. ‘I’ve got a good idea for a song to that tune of Hermann’s. Something like this. *You can take me if you want me or leave me if you*

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don't, and on this fatuous verbal theme I had to build. But in case I am seeming to disparage Pélissier's comic genius, let me hasten to add that in nine cases out of ten he was justified in believing himself to be everything and his collaborators very nearly nothing. His fear of paying too much was thoroughly justified when one compared what he was with what we did; but inasmuch as no man ever made such exhausting demands upon other people's devotion (so that to work for Pélissier meant that one was at his beck and call for work and play for literally every hour in the twenty-four) that lack of generosity was not so justifiable. 'You'll lend a hundred pounds to any actor that comes to your dressing-room and flatters you,' I once told him, 'but you'll argue for an hour whether you ought to pay me five pounds or six for a week's work.' 'Ah,' said Pélissier, 'but I despise *them*.' And after all there is much to be said for such a point of view, though at the time I might have put up with some of the contempt for a little more of the cash. Somehow or other *All Change Here*, as the

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revue was originally and (after some fifty other titles had been debated) ultimately called, was finished ; but it was a hard task in those days when the theatres and the music-halls were quarrelling over what was and what was not a stage play. The Alhambra management insisted that to avoid a prosecution by the 'Theatrical Managers' Association there was to be no spoken dialogue, so that every line of the revue had to be written in verse and set to music. On top of that Pélissier, whose comedy was of the most intimate kind, was overwhelmed by the size of the Alhambra and quite incapable of constructing an entertainment in which he was not going to take the chief part himself. His own shows were essentially improvisations, and all through the rehearsals of that revue we felt that Pélissier was treating them as he treated rehearsals of the Follies with the consciousness that he would be there on the first night to fill in with his own immense personality any gaps. He declined to have a producer. He would show the principals what he wanted and, 'You,' he said, turning to me, 'can manage

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the rest.' Now the rest consisted of the Alhambra ballet, and my feelings when I confronted over a hundred girls in practice dress for the purpose of turning them into temporary Follies touched the poignancy of despair. I had only the mistress of the ballet to help me, and whereas she wanted her best dancers I was searching for the best actresses. I smashed the Alhambra traditions of fifty years when I picked the girls I wanted for each scene. The revue was a failure, but since it led directly to my writing *Carnival* I look back at it with an affectionate emotion that no other production ever has evoked or ever will evoke, and wherever you are now, you dancing London ghosts, I salute you with a very deep and a very humble gratitude.

The failure of the revue hit Pélissier a great deal harder than anybody knew except myself. Outwardly he was setting to work as usual to prepare a new show for the Follies at the Apollo. The immense meals, the flock of visitors on Sunday afternoons, the drives to Ramsgate or Brighton after the performance on Saturday night were as

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they had always been ; but Pélissier himself was brooding over his first failure, and for ever asking me unanswerable questions about his future. He divined that he had reached his climacteric and that from now onward the struggle to maintain himself would become harder and harder. 'Some great change is coming,' he would assure me, his great violet eyes seeming as large as the Pierrot moons by the light of which he had always performed, 'and I shall either go completely to pieces or do something. But what I haven't the slightest idea.' Then he would lie back and roar with laughter. 'What on earth are you laughing at ?' 'Myself, of course.' After this he would turn serious abruptly. 'I like you, because you really do understand what I feel.' Then he would gaze at me, his lips turned down at the corners, like a giant baby about to weep. 'You do understand, don't you ?' he would plead. And then he would sit in a melancholy, trying to solve the problems of life with the mind of a child. I guessed that the malaise which now continually oppressed him was

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his own premonition of adolescence. But how was it possible to say this to a man of thirty-six? Yet that was in effect what was troubling him. He had outgrown the simplicity of childhood, and he was frightened by the complications of growing up. Gradually, however, he seemed to shake himself free from the depression and doubt about himself caused by the failure at the Alhambra. The success of my book, when at last it was published, gave him tremendous pleasure. On the Apollo stage he was always introducing gags about passionate elopements to the complete mystification of the audience. Their obvious bewilderment would have been a good lesson for any young writer in danger of supposing that a few good reviews had made him and his work famous. I once asked William Heinemann if a novel of his had not been a great success. 'Oh, yes, with the little London clique,' he replied, 'but that is not much use to a publisher.' One hears the splash made by the pebble of one's reputation in the small pond on which the literary ducks quack, but the ripples grow

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faint very rapidly and they soon vanish altogether.

I alluded just now to our drives after the performance to Ramsgate and Brighton. We used to travel in two Daimlers, and the privileges of the road were taken advantage of with a kind of Dickensian relish. On the way to Ramsgate we used to reach a public-house somewhere before Blackheath called, I believe, the *Marquis of Granby*, unless my Dickensian comparison is misleading me. It would then be about ten minutes to twelve, so that it was a pious duty to alight and take advantage of the fact that there were still ten minutes to closing time in order to fortify ourselves with Dickensian drinks for the drive ahead. This hostelry had a curious museum of oddities collected by the landlord, and we drank amid a compendium of the Late Victorian era. The next stop was about one a.m. at a roadside inn where, duly advised of our arrival, the landlady had prepared her speciality—the dish called toad-in-the-hole. I wish I could remember the name and locality of this inn, for we

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always ate there very heartily. Pélissier knew better than anybody how to motor. To be sure he drove much too fast for my taste, but he made up for this by enjoying an inn, and what is more by getting the best out of that inn. I motor with other people, and we are fobbed off with a miserable ordinary; but with Pélissier even in strange country we never failed to eat and drink magnificently. I can remember the flavour of the cold lamb at Exeter after driving westward from six o'clock of a blazing July morning, and the richness of the wine in Penzance that same evening. We were only once defeated and that was by the—well, by an hotel in Southampton. There we fared abominably, and though I won a large sum over a race and heard the news after lunch, even that did not destroy the memory of the badness. But the best of all our Saturday night emigrations were those to the Albion at Brighton. We never wasted a moment on that road over so much as a gin and bitters. Nothing was allowed to take the edge off Mr. Harry Preston's reception, and once more I see Pélissier as

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Gargantua when I recall him to my mind's eye, striding into the sitting-room and inspecting the cathedral of bottles on the sideboard. 'Coronation cuvée?' he asks, eyeing the champagne, and in response to the waiter's reverent nod of assent he beams like a schoolboy at the Christmas pudding. It was at Brighton that we used to sit up all night—Pélissier, Morris Harvey and myself—working at a new show for the Follies; and it was at Brighton that after getting to bed about seven o'clock we would be woken by Pélissier an hour later and invited to be ready to drive with him as far as Shoreham by nine. One of our troubles in those days was the difficulty of finding enough successful plays that lent themselves to being potted. We used to go and sit through a matinée, hoping to strike a rich deposit of potter's clay, while Pélissier would grow more and more like a tired baby in the darkest corner of the box, and the performers, having heard that he was in front and longing to be potted, acted for him with all their might and main. The only play at that time which really

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took his fancy was a Hawtrey production called *Inconstant George*, and this chiefly because he looked forward to having an enormous bed constructed on which the greater part of the action was to take place. I used to argue that it was really absurd to parody a farce, but he was so anxious to go bounding about on the springs of that huge bed that he insisted on potting *Inconstant George*. I wish that Noël Coward and Michael Arlen and the Sitwells had been in existence then. What fun we should have had ! As it was, we had to be content with Maud Allan. I have heard many people express regret that the Follies ever became more elaborate, and I am perfectly sure that they were at their best in the old days before the Apollo when they did a thirty minutes' turn at one of the music halls. No doubt if Pélissier, without expansion, could have kept that first fine careless rapture and made all the money his temperament required, it would have been better for him and better for his audience. Unfortunately no artist can crystallize himself at the moment of his nearest approach to

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perfection. The real reason why toward the end Pélissier began to lose some of his hold over the public was his own boredom with the development of his Follies. He became exasperated by his own creation. He was like the father of a grown-up family who resents his children's dependence on him, but who at the same time resents equally their daring to suppose themselves capable of the least independence. Without the breath of his life the Follies were dolls. Even the addition of Morris Harvey overweighted them; and, just because he was not a doll brought to life by Pélissier, he always seemed rather like a professional introduced from town to strengthen the resources of local talent. Lewis Sidney, who combined with Pélissier to make the greatest comic pair our time is likely to know, was curiously ineffective without him. The Folly with most natural talent was not Gwennie Mars, as the public always supposed, but Ethel Allendale. It was she who was always given the most difficult bits to do, and she alone in my experience added anything of herself with-

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out ever for a moment ceasing to be a perfect Folly. Gwennie Mars, Effie Cooke, Muriel George, Douglas Maclaren, Dan Everard, even the incomparable Sidney, were always themselves, and they only succeeded in being that so long as the Arch Folly was blowing life into them. Ethel Allendale was Pélissier's incarnate whim, such a perfect Folly indeed that for the public at large she remained only a shadow cast by the Pierrot moon, and they attributed many of the impersonations they had enjoyed and remembered best to Gwennie Mars.

When my sister Fay joined the Follies the end was already in sight. They were beginning to expire of sophistication in the attempt to keep pace with the public's enjoyment of them and to develop as their creator himself was developing. The unfortunate Alhambra revue began to seem only a temporary setback to Pélissier's ambitions. The mortification of that was forgotten at last, and he was for ever contemplating different ways to expand. He became pre-occupied with the notion of writing a play

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in which I was to collaborate with him, and the idea of which was a situation handled at the critical moment without humour; and then after a tragic dénouement the same situation was to be repeated, but handled this time at the critical moment with humour. The truth was that Pélissier was becoming so much obsessed by the importance of humour that his own humour took on a kind of grim seriousness. He had often been asked to take the Follies to America and he had always refused—rightly, I feel sure—because his instinct warned him that the Americans would not understand his methods. Indeed for many years his instinct had been very nearly always infallible; but now even his sense of an audience was beginning to desert him. He would occasionally indulge himself in a kind of savage insolence toward the public, and if he was remonstrated with he would declare his contempt for them because they had no humour. To the very end he remained an amateur; and, though this amateurishness was the essential charm of the Follies, so long as their entertainment

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retained its original simplicity and ingenuousness, as soon as they fell victims to elaboration this very amateurishness struck the public as the contemptuous indifference of a too successful man. Pélissier himself did often make the amateur's mistake of supposing himself superior to his audience, and his frequent failures to appear without notifying the public beforehand were typical of this unfortunate attitude. Knowing as we do how near he was to his last illness we find it easy to forgive him, but at the time he did his reputation much damage. I have always felt thankful that he did not live to encounter the war, for if his humour had moved much farther along the lines he was dragging it he might have lapsed into some tragical error of taste that would have seemed unpardonable in that period of strained emotions. On the other hand it is easy to imagine that if he had recovered from his illness he might have thrown off some of that unhappy obsession with the seriousness of humour, and expressed himself as completely as he longed. It is a common fate of humorists

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to feel themselves thwarted by the medium which has made them famous. You may find it in Swift as much as in Dan Leno, and genius burned so hotly in Pélissier that toward the end he fancied that the atmosphere of the Follies was stifling him. His marriage with my sister, which at the time struck so many people as a kind of Folly joke, was to Pélissier himself the outward signal of his resolve to conquer fresh territories of the mind. It would take a book to present his psychology adequately and make his complicated personality credible, and I feel that I may have done him an injustice by saying as much as I have without saying a great deal more ; but to say more would make this introduction to my sister's unpretentious and completely unrevealing autobiography much more intimate than she or I would care to have it. I envy—and perhaps she may envy too—the ability already widely spread and likely with the increase of psychical Baedekers to become far more widely spread to reveal oneself without the disguise of art ; but I cannot help sympathizing with her failure

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to make this autobiography more than a colourless record of the external incidents of a busy professional life. The critic may ask, and justly, why she should write about herself at all unless she was prepared to add something more to our knowledge of her than a mere list of plays in which she has acted a part, a catalogue of well-known names, and a time-table of journeys by sea and land to which are added like a coloured Christmas supplement a few trivial sentimentalities of the nursery and schoolroom. And really I should be at a loss to defend her playing with the pen as a child might play with a loaded pistol, were I not perfectly convinced that she had accepted the invitation of an editor to write her life in the same spirit as she might accept an invitation to play at a special matinee. People like her, who have inherited a long tradition as servants of the public, genuinely find it much more egotistical not to try, however inadequately, to entertain than to give what appears superficially an impression of greater egotism by acceding. I can vouch for this point of view in her

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because I am so well aware of it in myself. When a reporter invites me to talk about myself and my work I always do my best to be talkative. In doing so I am actuated partly by the knowledge that all legitimate publicity has a definite value, but just as much by the knowledge that the reporter is earning his livelihood in the same way as I am, that is, by trying to entertain the public. Why should I grudge him what he can make out of me any more than I should expect him to grudge what I can make out of him? It is a reasonable piece of barter, and though in these days of inspired amateurs who can climb Parnassus on motor-bicycles, the professional of any art is regarded with a condescension tinged with contempt, the comfort of being a professional is that one is not greatly worried by such an attitude. Whatever anybody who reads my sister's autobiography may think of it, he will at least admit that she has worked very hard for the last fifteen years, and that the position she now occupies at the age of thirty-one owes much more to her own industry than

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to the influence which is supposed to pour itself over the owner of a well-known theatrical name. It is really the record of so much hard work that makes it seem to me a little dull, for I must confess to finding a narrative of hard work, whether it be of an engineer or an actress, always a little dull. I work so hard myself that I prefer to read the reminiscences of people who never had to work and always had plenty of money. For me reminiscences should be in the style of Quida, full of grandeur and gilt and good cigars. I sometimes think that nobody who cannot afford a private yacht should tell us about his life. However, there may be some readers who will overlook the hard work in these reminiscences, and only count the number of times the authoress of them lunched with Sir James Barrie. Some readers may find that precise Ouidaesque splendour which I regretfully miss, for I know that in spite of the efforts of realistic novelists the glamour of the stage most obstinately persists.

I suppose that I ought to be able to add some reminiscences of my own to those

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which Fay has already dug up, from the not very deep past, about herself; but twelve years is just the wrong amount to be older than a sister, especially when that sister has embarked upon the full flood of a career by her seventeenth birthday. Dramatic ability was too generally spread through our family for any precocious display of it by Fay to be impressive. When one had had two aunts who at the age of six and eight were able to attract immense audiences all over Great Britain and America, the appearances of Fay in school entertainments lacked importance. In fact, my memories of her are entirely those of a little girl with very red hair in a smocked linen frock of old rose who had a bad habit of picking wild flowers and forgetting to put them in water, or of that same little girl in a smocked linen frock of peacock-green who cared excessively for all animals. It is not unusual to see photographs of popular actresses surrounded by their pets, and far be it from me to suggest that a devotion to animals has anything to do with histrionic effect. But in justice to

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Fay who, I observe, has a good deal to say about her pets, I feel it a duty to testify on her behalf that almost the only things in life that do really interest her are horses and dogs. I have had supper with her in a house, the size of which was somewhere between a large pill box and a small trunk, and it was like eating on the high seas owing to the motion of the table caused by the perambulations about the limited space of an Alsatian wolfhound, a bull terrier, and three Chows. In fact, the more I think about Fay in the past the less am I able to extricate her from the multitude of dogs by which she has always been surrounded. She came down to stay with my wife and myself in Burford when she was about eleven, bringing with her, of course, a dog. I remember this Aberdeen terrier with some particularity, because it was the only dog that ever bit me. I promptly threw it into the river Windrush whence it emerged and vanished for two days and nights, after which it returned smelling strongly of hay owing, it was presumed, to having lain concealed from

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my wrath all that time in a haycock. Even a week or two ago, when I paid her a visit at the Haymarket to plan how she could 'get away' with this autobiography and how I could 'get away' with this introduction, both of us feeling like the man who hoped to soften the heart of a cow by sitting on a stile and continuing to smile, the whole discussion was nearly rendered fruitless by the presence of a dog, or rather a very small puppy with which she had just been presented. An invitation to have supper at my club could only be accepted if she could bring her dog, and of course I offered to propose it as a temporary member. 'I suppose there is no objection to my sister's taking her dog upstairs?' I asked, of the commissionaire who guards the entrance. 'Every objection,' he replied sternly. 'It's the one thing the committee will *not* allow,' he added. I assured him that I thoroughly appreciated the committee's point of view, as indeed I did, whereupon in those accents of a curiously forceful sweetness which distinguished actresses resolved to have their

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own way always employ, Fay pointed out that the dog was a very small one. So it was—scarcely as large indeed as the commissioner's boot. Finally after various suggestions from the committee and counter suggestions from Fay, the dog was put in my hat and given to the cloak-room attendant to guard while we struggled with the problem of this introduction.

Now, in the course of that discussion we both agreed that we were neither of us as much absorbed as we ought to be in our professions, and yet that for some reason or other we both still worked at them as hard as might the most enthusiastic beginner. We agreed that one of the reasons why we worked so hard was to make enough money to do the things we liked doing ; but what seemed to us at that late hour a grave injustice was that, whereas both of us groaned under our self-allotted tasks, we were always credited by our critics with an almost sinful facility. Reading through this autobiography, I cannot help reflecting how few real parts my sister has tackled. If she has received from critics

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more credit for a pretty face than for anything else, and if her wonderful voice has too rarely had lines like Ophelia's to play upon, who is to blame but herself and her managers? Indeed, I can only think of two parts—Mary Rose and Ophelia—for which it would not have been easy, for which indeed it might have been impossible, to find another actress on the contemporary stage as suitable. It may militate against her reputation as an artist to admit that she requires a romantic background to show her off meetly, but I have very little doubt that this is so. Unfortunately for her the tendency of the period seems obstinately set against romantic drama, and since she is an extraordinarily competent all-round performer she has been able to trim her sails to the prevailing wind. Pot-boiling is for some reason considered a disreputable occupation for an artist, but one would be glad to hear from those who are most severe upon it of some method by which the writer or actor or painter of the day can earn a livelihood without pot-boiling. The generally accepted notion of

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pot-boiling is that the artist sells that peculiarly soulful soul of his for lucre. The implication is always of a deliberate betrayal of certain sacred gifts of which he is the unworthy receptacle. There is a belief quite widely extended that a writer, for instance, can at the promptings of Satan and by suppressing his better self, produce a best seller. This of course is nonsense. Best sellers are always written with perfect sincerity. They may lack every other grace, but their sincerity compensates for what is lacking. Every time that the story of Cinderella is treated freshly and with a real ingenuousness of outlook a best seller is born, provided that the writer believes he is producing a new Hamlet. I have often heard writers of successful rubbish protest that they long to write the really great stuff that is in them, and which they would be writing were it not for the fuel required to keep the fire going, but of course such an attitude is merely to impress their colleagues. As soon as they take pen in hand they forget all about that great stuff which they have been deliberately sup-

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pressing and come under the enchantment of their own cardboard figures. In fact, the one man who never produces a pot-boiler is the writer of best sellers. What then is a pot-boiler? As a writer my notion of a pot-boiler is a piece of work produced not because one burns to write it, but because one happens to possess the necessary equipment to produce it in spite of not particularly wanting to do so. There is, of course, the dignified alternative of refusing to write anything that one does not feel impelled to write. But here, even though I might be willing to forgo my bread and butter, I am defeated by an inherited professional instinct which forbids me having once pretended to be a popular entertainer to give myself what would seem to me airs. The fight for existence has been increasingly maintained at the expense of the individual, and nowadays a man is denied the luxury of making continual experiments with the livelihood he has chosen. All artists are exposed to the imputation of a self-indulgent existence, and there are still some performers who

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are inclined to cherish a pride in their professional equipment. In my case, and in the case of my sister, coming as we do at the end of a very long line of professional entertainers, we are both liable to be over-sensitive on this point. We have both of us been denied some of the pleasures that accompany success in the arts. So many of our relations and ancestors have been before the public that I do not suppose the idea that either of us would fail to be equally before the public ever entered our heads. We both of us took success for granted. We were brought up accustomed to seeing the names of relations in print and so we missed that novel sense of publicity which exhilarates less unhappily sophisticated performers. I had no tremor of a thrill from seeing my name attached to a book, and so far as Fay, according to her narrative, was thrilled by appearing as a Folly, that must have been because she hoped to write her reminiscences one day or because she was so very young, though I doubt the thrill was not quite so sharp as she now thinks. I once read with some

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envy an article by a distinguished editor in which he spoke of landing from a yacht in a south coast town after dark, and of walking up a street past the lighted houses with their closed doors, and of his thinking how delighted the inmates of any one of them would have been to offer him hospitality if he had knocked and told them who he was. To go through life under the illusion that the inhabitants of a south coast town (of all places !) would recognize the name of any editor, or if they did would invite him to dinner is about as incredible a condition of mental ease as that of the wife of an equally distinguished novelist who confided in me how when travelling once in an Italian steamer she had been thinking all the time how much thrilled everybody on board would have been if they had only realized who her husband was. Well, well, perhaps I am being equally fond when I say how much I regret that Fay has not had greater chances to show what she can do as an actress ; but, when from time to time I have remonstrated with her for what has seemed

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a lack of ambition and even, in spite of the very hard work to which she is a slave, a kind of laziness, she has always assured me that managers are not inclined to put her up as Juliet or as Lady Teazle. I have argued that she ought to take the risk on her own account, and she has pointed to her farm and her garden, to her horses and to her dogs. Now, I so profoundly sympathize with her in esteeming such things more important to happiness than artistic achievement, and I am myself so utterly disinclined to imperil the pleasures of life on small islands *biferique rosaria Paesti* for the risk, to which I am always being urged, of putting novels aside to write plays that I have never had much heart to argue with her. It is interesting for me to read that it was Mr. Arthur Bouchier, who was really the first to help Fay practically, because some twenty years ago, after an O.U.D.S. performance, it was Mr. Bouchier who offered me an engagement with him as soon as I came down. I told him that I had no intention of going on the stage. He evidently thought I was

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foolish, and said so. 'Well, of course, no doubt you think writing is better than acting, and perhaps it is. And of course you may have the makings of a great writer. I don't know anything about that. But I do know that as an actor you'd be making £2000 a year in next to no time, and do you think you'll ever be able to make that as a writer?' I look back now with some astonishment at my recklessness in turning aside from the obvious course, and I only mention this offer to show what a safe prosaic form of livelihood the stage had come to mean for us. It was like the old-established family business from which the heir was running away to embark on a dangerous career of his own when I chose to write for a living. Those who may feel inclined to blame my sister for lack of ambition must remember that she is really in a business from which the glamour has long since departed if it ever existed for her otherwise than as the first flush of independence. I fear that in trying to put forward a novel point of view about a popular actress I may prejudice many readers with what

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will seem to them an affectation of cynicism. They may even suppose that I am trying to give the impression that Fay despises the stage. On the contrary, she works at her job, as I have already said, with almost unceasing energy ; but it remains essentially a job. I doubt if she gets any more pleasure out of acting than I get out of filling a sheet of paper with words. Her work for the films is a detestable labour, and in many ways it is a thankless labour because in the films she has not the magic of her voice to help her, and I know that her performances, which she cannot avoid seeing, are perpetual discontent. Acting in a theatre has at least the advantage of variety. The surprising difference of every audience is a continuous refreshment, but a performance on the films is always the same, and I can imagine no swifter way of sending an artist mad than to condemn him to watch his performances repeated too often. I find the same nausea of repetition about my own plays, and I have never sat through one of them without sighing to alter it to fit the fresh audience. If my sister had

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been more genuinely absorbed in acting as an adventure, her reminiscences might have been a great deal more entertaining. The trouble is that she has been asked to write about what she has always taken for granted. She has really treated her task as she might treat a part which did not much interest her, and so she has contrived to omit most of what would really interest us. It is, in fact, a conventional performance, as indeed, I fear, is this introduction, which, if it were written at all, should have been written by a stranger, or at any rate not by a brother who is liable to perceive the reflections of himself in a sister, of a sister in himself, and for that reason presume common motives which may as a matter of fact be widely different.

Family history is not much in vogue at present, and genealogical excursions are apt to be as tedious as other people's dreams ; but I am old-fashioned enough to think that the suitable prologue to an autobiography is a brief account of one's forerunners, and I propose to supply what my sister has omitted. Those who find

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such divagations impertinent must forgive me for interposing a page or two more between them and my sister. In the first place, Fay's surname is not Compton. Having continually seen it stated in print that I assumed the name of Mackenzie, I detect in myself a certain anxiety to make it perfectly clear that I did not. Compton was the maiden name of a great-great-grandmother, and it was assumed on the spur of the moment by Fay's grandfather, Charles Mackenzie, together with the Christian name Henry, which was not his own either. The reason for this was a desire not to offend his puritanical relations still more deeply by advertising their own disgraced name. I had supposed until recently that he was the first actor on that side, but I find that his great-great-grandmother, Janet Mackenzie, was the cousin of David Ross, a celebrated tragedian, who in 1753 was left a shilling a year by his father on his birthday to remind him 'he had better not have been born.' Perhaps if David Ross had changed his name he might have inherited more. I do not

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suppose that Henry Compton ever heard of this remote cousin, and it is strange to see the situation repeated some seventy-five years later. Henry Compton's father, John Mackenzie, had given up a prosperous ship-building business to go in for preaching—obviously another form of dramatic expression, and a most unremunerative one. He wrote books too, the chief of which was a life of Calvin; but he had a half-sister, a Miss Mary Jane Mackenzie, who wrote novels—harmless expressions of early nineteenth century sentimentality which needed no pseudonym. John Mackenzie's father and grandfather were both shipbuilders on the Thames, and his great-grandfather, another John Mackenzie, was a shipping-master, the third son of the Reverend Bernard Mackenzie, episcopalian priest of Cromarty until he was deprived in 1690. He was descended from Murdoch Mackenzie, the fourth of Kintail, and his great-grandfather, Colonel Daniel Mackenzie, who was in the Dutch service, married a kinswoman of the House of Nassau. Through Janet Ross, the wife of John Mackenzie, the ship-

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master, the family is descended on the spindle side through Mackenzies of Redcastle, Kincraig, Tolly, Fairburn, and Achilty, from Kenneth Mackenzie the seventh and Kenneth Mackenzie the tenth of Kintail. To return to Fay's great-grandfather, the enthusiast for Calvin. He married a Miss Elizabeth Symonds, who introduced the blood of six generations of Worcestershire surgeons, a sixfold dose of Puritanism, and a quantity of brains. I should be chary of claiming the last without the authority of *The Eugenics Review* of July, 1925, which published a paper by Mr. W. T. J. Gun called *Further Studies in Hereditary Ability* in which, among the descendants of John Symonds, the last Worcestershire surgeon, are set down John Addington Symonds, Morell Mackenzie, Henry Compton, Rowland Hill, Louis Miall, Rosamund Hill, and George Birkbeck Hill, while still alive there are Lord Strachie, Mr. St. Loe Strachey, Sir Maurice Hill, the judge, Sir Leslie Scott, Dame Katherine Furse, and my sister Fay, to which might have been added the names of Canon G. A.

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Cook, the Regius Professor of Hebrew at Oxford, Miss E. M. Symonds the dramatist, Sir Francis Aglen, the Inspector General of Chinese Customs, and Miss Compton (Mrs. R. C. Carton)—a good mixed bag if ever there was.

Henry Compton married a Miss Emmeline Montague, the daughter of Henry Montague, a well-known light comedian known as Bath Montague, from his long association with the Bath Theatre. Those who admired my sister's performance of Ophelia may see in the National Gallery her grandmother in the same part, for she is the golden-haired Ophelia in Daniel Maclise's picture of the play-scene from Hamlet. After her marriage this grandmother, who played Juliet at Drury Lane in the year 1839, acted no more professionally, though she was a member of Charles Dickens' company of amateur strollers.

On her mother's side Fay is half a genuine American, for her grandfather, H. L. Bateman, belonged to a Baltimore family, the first member of which came over with Lord Baltimore himself. Why he

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should suddenly have taken to the stage is hard to guess, but perhaps being christened Hezekiah Linthicum was enough to cause a violent reaction from a Puritan education. He was really the first of the great American impresarios to invade England, and it was he who brought out Henry Irving at the Lyceum, to whose Hamlet his youngest daughter, Isabel Bateman, played Ophelia. That daughter is now the Mother-General of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, Wantage. His eldest daughter was Kate Bateman, who after playing in Shakespeare at the age of eight with her sister Ellen, and filling Drury Lane and the St. James' Theatre for a number of nights, not to mention every other theatre of importance in Great Britain and America, contradicted the usual history of infant prodigies by becoming a great tragic actress in maturity. The other infant prodigy, her younger sister Ellen, married (I think I am right in saying at fifteen) a Frenchman, after which she acted no more, though I believe she was considered to have more ability than her elder

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sister. The third daughter, Virginia, my mother, also acted, and was for a time my father's leading lady in his Old English Comedy Company with which he toured Scotland, Ireland, and the English provinces with hardly a break for over thirty-five years. But she never really cared for acting. Her own mother had acted in youth, but she was more interested in writing plays, some of which held the stage in America for many years. After her husband's death, Sidney Frances Bateman carried on the management of the Lyceum for some time, but finally handed it over to Irving and attempted to turn the Sadlers Wells theatre into a permanent home for Shakespeare, losing all her money in the process. She was the daughter of Joseph Leathley Cowell a famous comic actor of his time. Cowell's real name was Hawkins-Whitshed. His father was an English colonel, the son of a Bishop of Raphoe, and the brother of Admiral Sir James Hawkins-Whitshed. He married a Catholic, and his son, who was brought up as a Catholic, entered the navy in 1806 at the age of thirteen. He served

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three years as a midshipman and then got into trouble by striking one of his superior officers. This meant a court-martial with the probability of getting shot at the end of it. However, on the voyage home from a twelve-months' cruise in the West Indies a French ship was encountered, and he was allowed to fight his gun, which he did so well that on arriving at Plymouth the Admiral obtained his ante-dated 'discharge by sick list.' Then, changing his name, he took to painting portraits, and finally to acting, which he alternated with scene-painting. His first wife was a Murray, so that his second son, Samuel Cowell, who made a great name for himself as a kind of George Grossmith of the mid-Victorian period, was connected with the Kembles and Mrs. Siddons. I have seen it stated that Fay has Kemble blood, but this is not true. She is descended from Cowell's second wife, Frances Shepard, whose mother was a French emigrée of the Revolution. In 1821 Joseph Cowell was engaged by an American manager to appear at the Park Theatre, New York, where he made an immense hit.

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In 1844 he anticipated his great-granddaughter by publishing an autobiography called *Thirty Years passed among the Players in England and America*, theatrical life of Joseph Cowell, Comedian (Harper Brothers). The Dictionary of National Biography calls it 'clever and amusing.' I saw a copy of it when I was a boy, but I have never been able to get hold of one since. His second son, Samuel, by the way, made his first appearance at the age of nine for his father's Benefit at Boston in 1829. After the publication of his autobiography, Joseph Cowell grew more and more weary of his profession, came back to London, and painted to amuse himself for the rest of his life. However, he was twenty years later in writing his autobiography than his great-granddaughter has been, and although she herself is very fond of painting, there is no reason to suppose that after the publication of hers she will retire from the sawdust, brush in hand, to the uplands of Surrey. And I sincerely hope she will not take to writing.

COMPTON MACKENZIE.

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CHAPTER I

SCHOOLDAYS AND HOLIDAYS

Owing to my having become a professional actress when I was very young many people insist I am "at least thirty-five," or "a good forty."

To prevent unpleasant arguments on this delicate subject, I here emphatically state that I was born on the 18th of September, 1894, at 54, Avonmore Road, West Kensington.

My father's stage name was Edward Compton. My mother's Virginia Bateman.

I have two brothers, Monty (Compton Mackenzie), and Frank, who is now in America, and two sisters, Viola and Nell, who is Nell on the stage, Kay at home, and "Kaytrude" to me.

At 54, Avonmore Road the ascent from the breakfast room in the basement, to the

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nursery at the top, was a tremendous effort of endurance ; perhaps this accounts for the memories I have of Kay and myself evolving various methods of breaking the journey, such as a quick dash into the dining-room on the ground floor in the hope of a little fruit having been left about, followed by a nonchalant stroll into the library. The non-chalance was acquired to act as a blind should the room be occupied, the real object of our call being to see if the grown-ups had refrained from consuming all the sugar served with their coffee. Up again, the next storey bringing pleasant relief in the shape of a visit to mother's room. There was an ominous-sounding portière rod to mother's door which groaned at our entrance ; but, succumbing to our charm, it swung back again with a gentle sigh of content. In the room we essayed the climbing of a very pretty cane rocking-chair—pretty but dangerous ; when its mood was too temperamental for safety, we availed ourselves of two tiny four-legged stools whereon to rest our weary little bones. If we were lucky, we found

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mother in her room ready to joke and play with us, and to tell us the most entrancing stories of one *Silvertoes*.

Up the stairs again and round that very twisty bit—right past the night nursery, up into the day nursery or schoolroom as it soon became. For a long time, just as we were getting on the top landing I used to have a terrifying feeling that when we reached it we should find no baluſter there, and go crashing through that alarming well right on to the coloured tiles of the hall without even a hope of landing on the big bristly mat which bade those who were allowed to come in at the front door—SALVE.

That fear—which of course I outgrew—is one of the very first things I can remember. Another was being taken into the drawing-room with Kay one afternoon when mother was having an “At Home” and hearing one of the visitors exclaiming, “Oh, what lovely hair!” and mother’s instant, “Nurse, take the children upstairs at once.” Away we went crestfallen, but inwardly preening ourselves over this favourable comment on a possession which

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had hitherto only been the cause of unpleasant remarks such as "What made the donkey run?" "Brick top!" "Go it, Ginger!"

Father's homecomings from his very long tours were times of great excitement, looked forward to for weeks beforehand. On the day itself we could scarcely contain ourselves when commanded to stay quietly on the library landing; had we not been listening for the cab for hours before the train was even due? At last the slow trot of the horse was heard, and the scrunching wheels of a vehicle bowed down with luggage; it is a wonder that landing did not give way to the stampede of excited children.

But, mad with joy as I always was on these occasions, and full of sympathy with the hectic atmosphere of bustle that was the inevitable accompaniment of father's arrival, I can distinctly recall wondering why he should address an old man staggering under a portmanteau as "My boy," also turning over vaguely in my mind, why one of his hat boxes was such a funny



FAY COMPTON (ON RIGHT) AS SMALL BABY WITH HER
MOTHER AND SISTER

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shape, and what he could have put in it to make it so ; this mystery has never been solved for me.

Once the front door was shut we poured down the stairs and surrounded father in a welcoming mass of arms and legs, simultaneous conversation, and offers of assistance.

The dinners which celebrated these events were almost as grand as Christmas ones, and included health-drinking, for Kay and myself in a liqueur glass of champagne and soda.

What a kaleidoscopic jumble of "celebrations" of all kinds my mind conjures up as I think of those homecoming ones. I can see the big birthday parties, a cake with candles, Kaytrude nearly setting her frizzy little head alight by them. Christmas time with its pent-up mysteries of presents. I can hear us whispering in the dark. "Fay, are you asleep?" "No, I've got my eyes open." "I'll tell you what mother and father are going to give you, if you'll tell me what they're going to give me." I can see our well simulated surprise when the

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gifts were received. Now, a vision of the drawing-room cleared for the army of little people who responded to the call of "We are giving a little party" is before me; a slippery floor, the feel of dancing sandals whose soles no amount of scratching with scissors rendered safe. Again I live through the dread of being "chopped" in Oranges and Lemons; the responsibility of keeping the Slipper hidden; the eerie bewilderment of being a Blindman (and what was his "Buff" anyway?), the dawn of coquetry engendered by Hissing and Clapping; the drama of Dumb Crambo and Charades. I am in the dining-room once more where the familiar maids have become unfamiliar waitresses behind long tables decked with highly-coloured foods. I am holding a glass plate of ice-cream; someone asks me if it's to my liking; I hear my reply, "Yes, it's boiling cold."

Now, the blush of shame mounts to my cheeks as I recall something very disgraceful about grown-up festivities; two little girls in nightgowns, with bare feet,

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peering over the nursery balusters, the sound of chairs being pushed back, feminine voices coming nearer, masculine tones remaining faint, the slow and graceful exit of several beautiful ladies in evening dress, and those two naughty little girls deliberately trying to spit on their bare necks.

Let us get out in the air after that, and once more bowl our hoops down Avonmore Road. Now let's be allowed to ride on the top of a horse bus, beautifully red in colour and rocky in motion, causing us to speculate on how the driver ever remained on his little shelf—no wonder he had to be strapped in ! Sometimes we went to Hammersmith enjoying the glories of its bridge, the sight of the river with its friendly little boats and to crown all a picnic on Barnes Common.

Next in favour is a ride to Kensington Gardens with its friendly little low railings that we could climb over, balance on, jump down from, and on which we could be helped to perform long tight-rope acts.

Then a visit to the Kensington shops (we had a special weakness for dear Mr. Derry,

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and grandmama actually had a friend who knew Mr. Toms). A walk with father to Kensington Square where he lived as a little boy, a little rest at Herbert and Jones where *his* father used to take *him* to have an ice, a look at Knightsbridge Barracks where he had actually learnt to ride in the Army Riding School, and a walk in the gardens where once upon a time he walking with *his* father had met Mr. Thackeray who had tipped him a half-a-crown on hearing that he was going back to school next day. I remember the nights out-of-doors in London, when we drove in a fourwheeler to all the joys of the Pantomime at Drury Lane, or to a party, oppressed by the weight of having to say "Thank you very much" when the time came to leave; the terrifying journeys when one was to take part in a dramatic entertainment, and the entire drive was one long rehearsal; the sleepily triumphant returns when success had soothed the agonies of a "first night."

I must have had the happiest of childhoods, for all my recollections are wrapped

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up in a sensation of having had any amount of nice things to do, and the enjoyment of doing them ; even schooldays were nice.

Memories of my first school are inextricably associated with the story of Curly Locks, for I was never very sure which was supposed to be my own particular place, and always dreaded the descent of a giant member of the Transition with the enquiry, " Who is it sitting on my little chair ? "

From my son's general knowledge paper this holiday I have learnt that the whitebait is a baby herring, and the sprat a juvenile one : it doesn't seem very long ago since I mastered the fact that both kippers and bloaters are herrings.

Now a herring is evidently a very important creature of the sea—far more so than I am of the land ; but I would venture to sympathize with a friendly herring in its dread of a possible future spent in the mummified existence of a kipper or a bloater, and with its difficulty when called upon by the journals of the deep to record a true impression of itself in the past as a wily sprat or wriggling whitebait.

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Even as I tender sympathy to the herring, do you, my possible reader, extend a kindly indulgence to me as I try to recall the thoughts and feelings of myself when a small sprat.

I don't know that one has ever worked as hard since as one did in the kindergarten—the anxious energy of paper plaiting, card sewing, bead counting and basket weaving has never been quite surpassed, yet among the glories of hard work and the dawn of ambition, romance entered into my life.

I loved my love with an S because his name was Sammy and he was dressed as a sailor and he went to the same school. During “work” hours we sat on the same seat ; during play hours we shared the narrow discomfort of the swing. Together we strove with the first agonies of piano lessons, and when I returned from these, shaken with sobs, there in the cosy darkness of those little cubby holes where we sought our shoes and over-shoes, he comforted me. In my mind I call the first schooltime “the grey days,” not because they were dull and unhappy—that would indeed be an erroneous

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impression to give you—but the building was grey outside, much of the decoration within was of a soft greenish-grey and the Sisters wore habits of grey. They seemed in their gentle, tender care of us all as a flock of great grey doves hovering round, their long veils rustling like wings.

There was a little chapel in visiting which we became an army of diminutive sisters as we trooped in, our white coifs fluttering. I was quite disappointed to learn that we wore these head-covers by order of the edict of St. Paul and not as I thought from a sincere form of flattery on our part. My first day school was later my first boarding school too, so the plunge into life away from home was a gradual one. Indeed, to go to a boarding school three minutes away from home was so unexciting that both on the eve of our departure and our first morning there, we had to provide our own excitement.

Kay and I had been to visit father on tour—a most delightful form of holiday. Many times we had been to see him in *Garrick*, and his impersonation, and that of his lead-

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ing lady, caused us to indulge in long imitations of him when feigning drunkenness and of the heroine during her great moment—the faint at the end of the second act. Our last night at home we spent in diligent practising of “ Father ! I can’t, I can’t ! ” (falls to the ground). Finding the floor somewhat unsympathetic we let down our folding bed from the wall and continued our work on it ; we bounced down on that unfortunate spring so often that eventually it rebelled and bounced itself and us in it up on to wall again.

There we had to remain until our frenzied but muffled cries for help were heard and mother, maids and sister came to our rescue. Evidently this frightening experience was not sufficiently satisfying to my thirst for excitement, for on my first morning as a boarder, while diligently making my bed, I stepped back, tripped on the cubicle curtain, and fell splash into a specially prepared cold bath that one of my school-fellows indulged in daily. I emerged dripping but dignified, and was furious with my sisters for laughing immoderately while helping me to change.

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was the dog Nick, who was rescued from ill-treatment by two angry little girls with tearful indignation and references to the N.S.P.C.A. Nick should have been an Aberdeen, but missing that distinction rather obviously, we thought it wise to tell people he was a "Strathpeffer" and hope they would think it a new and fashionable breed. Very often they did. Then there was Charles, a deerhound with a pedigree going back to Queen Anne given to Monty by a friend who is now President of the Board of Trade and called after Sir Charles Grandison, "the best bred fool in literature" according to my brother. We felt he had a special claim on our kind consideration. And there was the French poodle engaged to act in one of father's plays, who was not allowed to dismiss him with a fortnight's notice at the end of the run. •

All of these and many more I can see at the cottage where all my first holidays were spent, feel again my love of them, my love of the country, the picnics in the woods with the half-terrifying, half-fascinating fear of altercations with a keeper always before

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us. I remember the spring when we decided to supply many churches in London with primroses and violets, and not even the dreadful rule that Viola enforced involving the counting of the number of primroses in each bunch, which rule led to our falling into fitful slumber at night murmuring, "One, two, three, four," etc., could kill my affection for all the spring flowers. I remember the winter, when Frank and one of his brother officers were with us, and the many journeys I made through the snow to the one village shop in order to keep up a supply of oranges.

Bullet, (that was the nickname of the Dublin Fusilier), eventually tired of oranges, so I trotted to and fro, though less frequently, with small bottles of stout to which he would salaam and prostrate himself. He and my brother Frank were inspired by the wintry weather to turn our little garden switchback into a toboggan, and it was all very exciting, but the switchback never quite recovered.

Frank used to help us clear away after meals. It was a lengthy process, for, before

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he would begin or let anyone else begin, he insisted on standing on a chair with one foot on the table, the tray we wished to use balanced on his knee, singing the whole of either *King Charles* or *Ho, Jolly Jenkin*, and not till the last note had died away were we allowed to start our work.

Before I went to the far-away glories of quite a big boarding school in Surrey, there was a time when I took an enforced holiday at the country home in Cornwall to which we moved when the cottage in Hampshire became too small for us. I say an enforced holiday as it occurred on account of my health. That reminds me of something funny that happened the other day. My understudy in a recent production met some friends who, eager to cheer her, said: "Understudying Fay Compton? Oh, you poor dear! You'll *never* get a chance to play—she's as strong as a horse and is *never* off." Well, I gave that understudy a chance to play for nearly two weeks, and all my other understudies have played for me, and though I love to be likened to a horse—being so fond of them—I've known

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a few that weren't very strong, and for myself—well, I've had nine operations, several following severe illnesses.

In Cornwall for nearly a year I was only allowed to play the piano and be out of doors. I had a donkey and chaise. I used to groom Jenny, harness her, and drive her down the long road, by the walled garden, over the bridge and across to the other side of the estuary that made the village on its bank where we lived look like Southend by day and Venice by night.

We were near St. Ives, where I met many artists, and sat for some of them. On subsequent visits from school to numerous picture galleries, I was guilty of keeping a careful look-out for a canvas of myself, but never, never, did I see one !

After this jolly year in Cornwall I went to a real boarding school, and arriving there I felt like one lost in a rabbit warren—so many rooms, so many girls all in blue gym. suits. How difficult to remember one's way about ; how awful to be unable to remember the way to one's classroom, bedroom, to the cloak-room. How impossible almost to think one

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would ever distinguish one face from another of all those black-ribboned, be-plaited, long-legged creatures.

One or two extracts from my diary will show that life at boarding school held the usual trials and triumphs that we contend with when we grow up.

Nov. 27th.

Exams. begin on Wednesday with French. Of all things to begin with—poor me—just my luck. Miss L—— was beastly at singing class the other day. She told me I spoilt the whole class, and that I was very stuck-up, but never mind, I don't expect she meant it. All the girls have been awfully nice to me lately, anyway.

Dec. 4th.

I got on quite well in the exams. after all. Honours in History. I must write to mother at once. I'm so excited. Two weeks now, and I shall be home, hurrah! We're going to the British Museum on Saturday. I hope it will be nice.

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March 21st.

Miss J—— was very nasty to me last French Grammar 'cause the other girls had had a class on the same lesson last week, and she didn't ask me questions for a long time, and then she suddenly turned round and said, "It's no good asking you, you don't know anything." It sort of damped the whole day for me. Must stop writing this now, such a lot of study to do. We had a Lacrosse match yesterday, and were beaten.

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April 3rd.

I believe we have got to do Sir Peter and Lady T—— at the end of the term, that means poor mother will have to fork out the black velvet dress again. I wonder if she would have the brass buttons at the back of the coat taken off and others put on if I tell her that they all said I looked like a coachman at the back. I must ask her if she has a little dress for a Lady Teazle whose height comes up to my eye; she had to wear one of the elder girls' evening dresses last time and it didn't look very like it.

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July 8th.

I must get a wrist strap for tennis as my wrist gives sometimes, and I twisted it a



FAY COMPTON AGED 14½ YEARS

[*Schmidt*

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bit to-day. The drawing exam. comes off on Wednesday. I hope and pray I pass with honours.

June 29th.

Open Day is early this term. Dress rehearsal to-morrow of the scenes from Richard II. I hope Viola will find a cloak to send me for Bolingbroke. They are all wearing cloaks over the short things so that Miss T—— won't think we're indecent. I tried on my Juliet dress yesterday, and it looked perfectly *awful*. I looked as if I had got a wet bathing-dress on, and as for fitting me, it wasn't anywhere near it. One of the girls said to me at tea to-day, "You did look a freak last night." Let's hope it will get altered. A Grammar Exam. on Monday. I know I shall fail—oh, why were exams. ever invented.

July 25th.

I got Honours in the Drawing Exam. and everything at Open Day was a great success, and the Juliet dress ~~was~~ very pretty eventually, and I can't sleep—wouldn't it be awful if anyone saw the light. Everything's packed up, I'm going home! I'm going home! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! Lovely, lovely, lovely. Ripping, ripping, ripping!

CHAPTER II

ABROAD AND HOME AGAIN

When I had been at school for some time, my mother, who had had a very serious illness, was ordered to go abroad by her doctor, and to my great joy I was chosen to go with her. In order to make it possible for me to do this, it was arranged that I should leave school rather sooner than was originally intended. You can imagine my delight at two such pleasant things happening at once !

That is how I came to go abroad for the first time and to such wonderful places ; I will not attempt to describe the beauties of Sicily to you—of what use if you have seen them for yourself ? And if not, what use ?

Mother was not left solely to my youthful care—an older friend of mine came with us.

From Palermo I carried away that wonderful, overwhelming, never-to-be-forgotten scent of violets. There were wide thick borders of them round all the garden beds.

My mother was better by the time we got to lovely Taormina and each day of our stay there saw her improving in health and spirits. One morning I went out alone to sketch, and while climbing one of the cliff paths I saw a man clambering nimbly up from the shore to intercept me. As he grew near I saw that his walnut-coloured face was old and evil ; he wore a kerchief round his head, and ear-rings, and in the sash around his waist he carried a knife. His legs and feet were bare, he spat strange Sicilian words at me. I signed to him to come no nearer, but cat-like he sprang towards me. 'Heavens !' thought I, 'a brigand—an English maid — kidnapped — ransom — or shot at dawn.'

I dropped my sketchbook and fled back to the hotel, breathless. I described the cause of my discomfiture to learn that he was a harmless boatman simply using his arts of persuasion in order that he might row me out to a cave.

After that I felt it was time to learn the language. We took lessons—our instructor was of that splendid kind that knows no

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language but his own and we did not succeed in learning a word of his.

Mi-Carême arrived, and we joined the Carnival. During its joyous festival I met and captured—and was captured by—a young Adonis, Taormina's pride! Fortunately he spoke English well. With all the tact of a Latin he produced a charming friend of his for N—, so that two red-haired girls and two dark youths might roam Taormina's countryside together.

But it is not possible in Sicily to carry off in all the glory of his manhood one who had made many a heart beat quickly, and not fan the flames of jealousy and revenge. We had been to see the sun rise on Monte Venere—at four o'clock in the morning we had climbed the mountain path, the four of us, and watched and waited; there were clouds, rain, a sirocco, anything but sunrise. We returned into the town and met a whispering group of youths and maidens. The girls pointed at my friend and me, and addressed a volley of Sicilian at their swains. One of these swaggered up and uttered what was evidently a string of insults to

our cavaliers, regarding us; fists were clenched, and instantly a street fight had begun. We managed to get ambush in a courtyard. The Sicilian maids did not fight, but we, seeing our men outnumbered, joined in, where it seemed as if they would be wounded—one of the enemy threw a knife, it pierced my Adonis's hat and pinned it to the wall behind him. Like furies we fell upon them and they fled—leaving us panting, dishevelled, and, now that the danger was past, trembling with fear.

After that thrilling episode, peace; nothing further occurred to mar enjoyment of every moment spent in that city of enchantment. It was with a sudden shock I realized that mother was better—it was time for her to go home and for me to be left in Paris where, it had been decided, I was to go to a “finishing school.” Cruel fate! How could I support it? To be happy in Sicily all day, with no thought but of all the beauty surrounding me—the blue sky, the bluer sea, the gardens, the cypress trees, the orange blossom, the children, all beautiful, and to wake up the next day with the

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intolerable thought that I must leave it all—and leave my Prince Charming !

Arrived in Paris I spent much of the first part of my stay in acquiring an impressive roll to my r's ; my address, quarante-quatre Rue Molière, very obligingly supplied me with a form of exercise which I practised on all cab-drivers, officials and shop assistants who would allow me to do so.

I went to Paris to be finished, but Paris finished me ! One bright spot in the gloom of the gay city—and one only—a performance of *Hamlet*, with Mounet-Sully as the Dane, supported by what would, I suppose, be called a very ordinary company, and with what could not fail to be described as a most uninspiring production scenically. But I have to thank the Ophelia of that production for one of those rare and precious moments when one is drawn out of oneself and made to forget one's surroundings. I felt all the pathos of the mad girl and a great pity for her, my flesh crept as she backed slowly towards the huge curtains and, unable to find her way through them, laughed and laughed with fear.

Years after, when I played the part myself, I very often thought of and thanked that Ophelia in my heart.

I suppose the real reason for my being so unhappy in Paris was that an attack of appendicitis was beginning to assert itself then and that I really was ill. I did not take kindly to the ladies in whose care I had been placed, nor did they take kindly to me. There were only two other pupils besides myself, and they left soon after my arrival ; there was I, all alone with two loud speakers of a foreign tongue—two swarthy dames with beetling brows and flashing eyes. I became ill and had a very bad attack of pain ; one of the sisters softened to me and became as the White Queen, but the Red Queen prepared the shallowest of hot water baths for me, purposely disturbed my slumbers with a beating up of pillows and a long murmur of conversation to the White Queen, of which I understood enough to grasp that I had nothing the matter with me and was either acting or the victim of imagination.

I lay in bed soothed by the ministrations

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of the White Queen, but forming plans for escape. As soon as I was well enough I made a secret journey to Cook's, bought my ticket, and while the Queens were on a long marketing expedition I packed my trunk and left Rue Molière. I had warned them at home of my arrival, but their welcome was distinctly unenthusiastic; there was a coldness in the atmosphere which was both numbing and unpleasant.

Father thawed first and smuggled me behind the scenes for the big gala performance given that year in honour of the Kaiser's visit to London. I was introduced to Sir George Alexander, and I told him that we had met before. In response to his bewildered gaze I reminded him of an occasion, several years before, when he had judged the young aspirants of a children's Salon in a recitation, and had been kind enough to award the first prize to one Fay Mackenzie, but not until this had been presented, with some charming words of praise and encouragement, did he know that the proud winner was Edward Compton's little girl.

Of course he remembered now—nine or ten years do make a difference, though, even in the young. I wanted to go on the stage now? To be sure I did—well, perhaps one day I might be at the St. James's with him.

I did get to the St. James's later on, but it was at the time when he was very, very ill; nevertheless, I encountered the protecting atmosphere of the actor-manager while in his theatre and found him a wonderful producer—and I shall always retain the sense of gratitude I felt to the courtesy, consideration and interest bestowed on us all by his staff and himself.

The problem of a sixteen-year-old daughter who had left her English school by her parents' wish, and her foreign one by her own—she entirely refused to return to the latter—was solved most practically and delightfully by the said parents in a decision to send the recalcitrant one to the school of the stage. Influence was brought to bear, introductions effected, interviews arranged. Then I encountered the misfit feeling brought about by those five minutes of conversation during which the high

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spirit of optimism one always started off with gradually trickled away to a low feeling of despair, as one learnt that one was too young—or not young enough—too fat or too thin—too short or too tall—not dark enough—too Titian—of too soprano or too contralto a voice.

Would one ever be quite right—or the “type” required? At last there was a faint hope of my being suitable for Iris Hoey’s part on tour, in *Baby Mine*.

And then—casually, so casually as to seem unreal—came my introduction to Harry Péliissier and my engagement as a Folly. It happened in this way. My brother, Compton Mackenzie, appeared to lunch on the occasion of my return from one of the pilgrimages I have just described.

“Hullo, Fay, you look a bit down in the mouth—had a row with one of your myrmidons of the Cricket Club?”

“Don’t be absurd, Monty. I never have rows with them—but I haven’t time for dances and things just now—I’m looking for work.”

“Stage?”

"Yes."

"Musical side?"

"Oh! no!"

"Why not?"

"Couldn't do it."

"Nonsense; you were remarkably good in that ridiculous entertainment of yours in Cornwall this summer."

"Oh, that!"

"Yes, *This, That and The Other* (with his smile that apologizes for smiling even as he does so). "An imitation of the Follies, of course, but not bad—not at all bad."

I was overcome by praise from Monty—members of one's family are always so terrifying—but I faltered.

"Well, you see, we've been to the Follies tons of times. I'd rather go there than to any other theatre in London."

"That's good, very good." Again that wrinkling of the laugh-lines round his mouth, sundry puffings at the ever-present pipe, and the reflective look in his dark eyes that means he is about to propound some scheme—but what?

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"Did you know I'm writing for Pélissier ? "

"No—Monty ! " Amazing man to break this astounding news to me thus suddenly.

"Yes, lyrics, Potted Plays, and so on. Remarkable man, Pélissier, very interesting to work for—you'd better come and sing for him—and do your 'imitations.' Look as nice as you can. I'll arrange it—must get along now."

He was gone, and the bang of the front door still echoed in my ears. Stunned, I sat in the dining-room feeling the walls grow higher and higher, and Fay dwindling—dwindling . . .

How extraordinary Monty was, to be at work upon an affair of almost national importance and to refer to it with such non-chalance. And what had he said about me ? "Good"—no, "remarkably good ! "

Sing for Pélissier—attend one of those voice trials I had seen burlesqued—myself a victim—even for the ultimate glory of becoming a Folly, could I endure that ? There was no one at home ; I wandered from room to room, wishing we did not live

in such a large house, so empty when one sought someone to confide in. It was very selfish of Viola to have got married and gone away ; she was never there now when I wanted to talk to her. And Kay, too, why did she have to be on tour just now ? Mother was at the Theatrical Ladies' Guild, she wouldn't be home till six ; father not till dinner time. Frank was in Crete. Even the dog Nick was paying a visit to the vet. I came to the large mirror, above the console-table, outside the drawing-room door.

I stopped to fuss with my hair and arrange my blouse ; I was turning away when something unfamiliar in my reflection attracted a more careful scrutiny. Positively, a ruff was forming round my neck, a little pointed cap was already perched upon my head, pom-poms were beginning to sprout upon my shoulders, the colour-scheme was black-and-white—said I to myself.

“Not so fast—you haven't passed that voice trial yet, Fay ! ”

Mercifully, I was allowed a private one. I sat in the stalls at the Apollo, shaking with

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fright and waited for the great H. G. P. My sister-in-law was there to accompany me, and Morris Harvey, as a master of mimicry, had come to criticize my powers in that direction.

Harry was about fifteen minutes late, and as each minute went by I changed my mind as to whether I wished he would come at once or never.

The Folly floorcloth was on the stage being repainted ; the faithful Vic* was hard at work upon it. There was a bustle of arrival, and Harry appeared. He was requested not to walk upon the black pom-pom, the fresh paint on which was still wet ; his method of complying was to take a flying leap right into the centre of it and jump up and down like a great schoolboy. Nobody could have been angry with him. They all shouted with laughter, in which even Vic joined and gave him an encore ; this he would not take ; instead he heard one. I sang my best, gave my " imitations " as well as I knew how, and played the piano. It was soon over and I was taken to a

* The Carpenter.

delightful luncheon-party and on to the Coliseum.

During the afternoon, Harry offered me an engagement as a Folly, at a salary of £3 10s. per week; I accepted and returned home, bursting with pride and joy.

Then began a whirl of a time. Harry was anxious for me to imbue as much of the Folly spirit as possible before rehearsals for the new bill commenced. Accordingly I joined the huge family of Follies and aids to Follies that always surrounded Harry; Monty and Faith* had already become members of it, with them I paid a flying visit to Ramsgate and returned to visit at Finchley. There Harry had his own big house, which was always filled to overflowing, and a lovely old garden. Those of the Follies who were not actually staying in the house at the time were constantly with us on the telephone, and there was always a good chance of finding the lined and humorous face of Lewis Sydney, or the dark Ethel Allandale, the fair Muriel George, the

* Mrs. Compton Mackenzie.

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imperturbable Morris Harvey, or all of them, round one in the dining-room.

Meals at Finchley never seemed to take place under a quota of at least sixteen guests, all talking, laughing, joking, and sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally, providing material for the inimitable Folly burlesques. It was a most comfortable house to stay in, but disturbing to sleep in, for at any time during the night one was liable to be wakened by the sound of a piano, an organ, a spinet, or some unknown instrument, for Harry slept so badly he often spent more than half the night playing and improvising. He had a delightful Samoyede dog named Polar, and I recall the sensation of there being something vaguely prophetic about the way he welcomed me when I first arrived at Elm House, as much as to say: "*You* may not know it, but *I* know that you are going to stay here for a considerable time, permit me to show you over the house, in order that you may become accustomed to your new home as soon as possible," and he led me to every room and all over the garden.

It was only a few days later that Harry proposed to me. He was resting from a vigorous set of tennis, lying flat on his back on a gravel path of all uncomfortable spots to choose, and when he observed, "Fay, will you marry me?" I thought he was joking, and pelted him with tennis balls, telling him not to be a foolish, fat fellow. Everybody who knew him or saw him on the stage will remember Harry's amazing personality, how attractive he was by reason of his gifts, how lovable by reason of himself, and who was I to be proof against his magnetism? About a week later, during which I had learnt he was not in jest, I was kneeling on the chesterfield that stood at the back of his favourite piano, my arms on it, my head on them, watching him play; he looked up and asked the same question again—and this time I answered "Yes." Immediately he burst into a little song, *Fay, Fay, Fay, will you never, never run away?* turning it into a triumphal march as the improvisation continued.

During the seven weeks we were engaged, rehearsals all day, and every day—much

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more musical work than I had ever coped with before (though I had studied music very thoroughly at school)—solos, part-singing in the choruses and quartettes, accompanying the others, a bit of dancing—you may remember how everybody did everything in a Folly entertainment. Though I had learnt singing, dancing and piano playing I had little experience of dashing from one to the other with the rapidity and ease required of a Folly. Then the second half of the bill, though more dramatic in character, was fraught with difficulty. Three small sheets of typescript were handed to me and they represented all one said and did throughout several potted plays and a long burlesque, but one gradually found out what more one said and did at rehearsal and found out more still on the first night !

Oh, that first night ! I hope I shall never be quite as nervous again as I was then, for as well as the agony of desire to get through my “bits” without mistakes, was the terrible nervousness of the knowledge that I was following Gwennie Mars, who was

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an experienced genius at her work, and knowing that however hard I tried I could not fail to be a disappointment. But, even as the Perfect Day, all first nights have to come to an end, and with the anxiety of that one—my first first night—over, I began to enjoy the work and all that it meant to be a Folly amongst all the other Follies.

My first appearance was at the Apollo at the beginning of the autumn of 1911; and there on the evening of September 16th a very large audience of Harry's friends and admirers gave a riotous reception to Mr. and Mrs. H. G. Pélissier.)

CHAPTER III

A MUSICAL SWITCH

Harry lived and breathed music ; when not rehearsing, writing, designing, acting, or at work on business management, he was composing. It was a dreadful pity that so much of a really high order that he created was lost for lack of time to write it down ; the constant demand of the ever changing Folly bills made it practically impossible for him to do more than provide for these a never failing supply of ballads, concerted numbers, accompaniments for the quartettes, and incidental music for the potted plays and the burlesques. Life was a melody with an ever changing accompaniment, and one motif followed another with bewildering rapidity ; the time was crowded with work and play so intermingled as to become almost indistinguishable, for work was play and play was work in those days.

No doubt it is best, whatever profession or work one undertakes, to have the most

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strenuous times first, when one is fired with zeal, hope, and ambition. Looking back, I can see that it was by a stroke of good fortune that I started my career as a "Folly," for surely there could have been no better training ground for a young actress than the work I was called upon to do then.

I must confess that I was really engaged as a mimic, and though I had seemed to possess some aptitude for mimicry in private and at amateur entertainments, I was little or no use at it before a big public. The self-consciousness of the seventeen-year-old asserted itself; and I had not mastered the technique of mimicry sufficiently well to carry me through.

There was no time to do anything but dash up in the morning. Mercifully Harry had the most excellent of housekeepers, so I was free of all that work. I could hope for two minutes in the bathroom, pray that five minutes might be allowed for breakfast, fall into the car, clutch at words of songs and parts, attempt to memorize them on the all too brief drive from Finchley to the Apollo, rehearse like

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mad all the morning, consume a few sandwiches at lunchtime, for Harry had a rooted objection to restaurants and being stared at. "It is not just being looked at, Fay, that I mind, and being recognized. These are compliments. But there are ways and ways of looking, a polite one and the reverse. The first one is humbly grateful for ; the second makes you wonder whether you're a strange and uncanny product of the prehistoric animal world."

Back to work all the afternoon, surreptitious working up of dances and business between ourselves while Harry was wrestling with scenery and lights, perhaps a run back to Finchley for a little rest and a meal—perhaps not—and then "the show" in which everyone worked as hard as they knew how and played as many parts as Harry could think out for them. No use to think it was impossible to effect an entire change of dress and make up from a flapper to a charwoman in two-and-a-half minutes.

"Nonsense—plenty of time—jolly well have to," was what greeted a mild protest

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from me, and I did the change in the two-and-a-half minutes allowed.

Many visitors after the performance. Nothing delighted Harry so much as a congratulatory visit from the many actors and actresses who had come to see themselves burlesqued. Home again to supper and sleep.

We all understudied each other, and were liable to have to go on for anyone, either of one's own sex or the opposite. On one occasion I had to appear for Muriel George, as I happened to be the only one who knew the words of her song. She has a charming and well-trained high soprano voice, as you know ; at that time I had a little squeak of a voice, but I was called upon to make the best of it, and so was the poor audience.

Another time, Harry was ill ; I was foolish enough to be the one who remembered the words of his " Arizona " song, no time to find a replica of his clothing, the original had to be used and I appeared with his cowboy trousers tied round my neck and his hat well down over my eyes. Our resourcefulness was constantly being called

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upon in the matter of costume. Harry would suddenly say, "We want two 'dandies' here. Ethel and Fay had better do them. Scrounge around for something to put on." I scrounged Harry's Pickwick hat, a dirty dickey and waistcoat all in one of his, and an old frock coat—but trousers I could not find. At last I espied one leg of a pair appearing out of a basket, but Ethel had got there first and had obtained a firm hold of the other leg; in order that one of us at least might appear with a complete pair, I let go and bethought me of an old pair of the bell variety I had worn as a sailor in the Music Hall burlesque. Ethel went one better than I did, though—she found a cane. Harry approved of us highly.

A distressing breach of etiquette on my part in these early days that I have often thought of since with shame, was when I made the mistake of accepting a dressing-room to myself, and worse still of Harry's generosity in having it entirely redecorated and refurnished for me throughout. Of course I should have realized that I was just

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an inexperienced artist drawing a very small salary and unworthy of either the room or its decorations. I noticed a coldness on the part of the other Folly girls on the subject, and that they did not seem to join in my admiration of the room when it was finished with the enthusiasm I expected. For a very long time now I have understood their resentment and have blushed at the thought of how often in my ignorance I must at other times have unwittingly offended that most sensitive of institutions—professional etiquette.

Feeling that my room had not been sufficiently appreciated, I was more than glad when my headmistress came to see me as a Folly, and I was able to entertain her in it. She had seen the skit on Macbeth, and I don't think she was quite sure as to whether she had thought it funny, or merely rude to Shakespeare. I had still much to learn of the "unwritten laws" of the theatre, but at any rate by the time we went on tour, after our season in London, I had acquired enough grasp of what is done and what is not done to understand that the sacred rule

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of the allotment of dressing-rooms is governed by one's position in the company. I lay very low and took whatever was given me.

We did not work quite so hard on tour as in town ; even so, I was quite glad of the enforced rest the coming of young Anthony gave me and the chance to have a holiday in Hampshire with my sisters. Harry was still on tour, but came to see me every week-end, taking long journeys from Scotland on the Saturday night after the performance, and arriving a bit weary but quite cheery on Sunday morning.

One Sunday we were not expecting him ; it was the week-end following one during which some misguided soul had challenged us to yodel, declaring that none of us could do so. According the woods around us had echoed incessantly the strange sounds we considered were a replica of those heard upon the Swiss mountains and on gramophone records. During the week our ardour had abated and we had almost forgotten what keen yodellers we had become ; early in the morning we

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heard extraordinary noises coming from the garden. I stole into Kay's room and asked her if her small daughter Jane was the origin of them. Kay listened and in fury pointed to her sleeping infant.

"Do you think she would ever make a noise like that, even in sleep?"

I tiptoed to Viola's room, awoke her and asked if she thought she could have been practising any of her new singing exercises while sleeping. She was very much annoyed too. "I couldn't make a noise like that" (it was still going on) "even in a nightmare."

We decided we must be brave, face the cold dawn and investigate. Clad in some blanket coats we thought very well of, (by the way, Arthur Wimperis, who wrote a lot for the Follies in those days seeing me in mine had remarked, "that carpet has been well laid on you, Fay"), and armed with a lantern we sallied forth.

The eerie cries led us to the foot of the long hill on which the bungalow was perched, and there was Harry—who had turned up after all—solemnly standing at the

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gate, the brim of his hat turned up all round, with a little feather stuck in one side of it, his right hand clasping one of those things you use to push windows up with (no one knows where he got it from), diligently yodelling !

With a beaming smile he said : " I've been practising all the week ; I think I've got it pretty well now, don't you ? "

Oh, dear, how we laughed—but not quite so much as I am afraid we did on the day we all went to church in a very small edifice of corrugated iron lined with wood, and a little man, a stranger to us, came and read the lessons. " Now Bawabbas was a wobber," he began, and that started us, and I fear the whole frail structure shook with our efforts to stop giggling, by the time the lesson was at an end. We didn't mean to laugh—we didn't want to go on laughing—but that terrible hysteria that renders one helpless had us in its grip. You will sometimes hear people say, " They were laughing on the stage—the actors and actresses—wasn't it disgraceful ? " but you know something irresistibly funny happens occasion-

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ally, that the actors and only the actors are aware of, and once they are seized with that irresistible and infectious hysteria it is as bad, or rather worse, to be on the stage as in church.

I know it is very wrong, and hold no brief for any artists who deliberately create laughter amongst themselves. But there is a form of hysteria that is really painful, and most difficult to stop.

When his tour was over, Harry and I had a delightful month or so at Shoreham in a most comfortable "shack." There business was combined with pleasure, for Harry was doing a lot of preliminary work in connection with his *Aladdin*, in the way of scenery and music. Hugh Wright came down quite often to help write the lyrics, and wrote a good many foolish ones to make me laugh too. When we got back to Finchley, Christopher Wilson and Harry got hard at it, as many times before—one at one piano and one at another, both improvising and, wonder of wonders, managing to write down and orchestrate what they had been playing. That boy of mine ought to be

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musical ! And so he is, if to be so is to love music.

Barely three weeks after Anthony's birth I had to be operated on after three weeks of continual pain for appendicitis. The only thing that soothed me at all during that time and helped me to go to sleep was for my sister Viola to read aloud a book of which I was very fond when I was tiny, a book of Stella Austin's called *Stumps*. The heroine is a little girl of four who speaks in a pronounced form of baby language. She was droning this out one night by the dim light of a candle, not daring to stop in case I was not really asleep, when she heard a heavy sigh. Turning round she saw Harry sitting in the shadows unreached by the candlelight. "Go on," he whispered ; "I've been here a long time, go on, it soothes her, and it interests me."

I suddenly became much worse, and the specialist who was called in said that despite the danger of operating he must do so at once if there was to be any chance of saving my life. And I pulled through.

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I was back again at work in the autumn, feeling better than I had done for years, and it was just as well, for we did a season at the Palladium combined with other music halls. This was our programme :

Appeared in first house at Palladium, accomplished eight changes of costume and make-up, went to and

Appeared at end of first house at Stratford-at-Bow. Another eight changes of costume and make-up.

Appeared at beginning of second house at Stratford. Another eight changes of costume and make-up.

Returned to and

Appeared at end of second house at Palladium. A final eight changes of costume and make-up.

Of course, I know there is nothing exceptional about this. Many a twice-nightly revue must be giving the same invaluable training to many an artist. Still, it's hard work, rather too hard.

When you are on the halls you expect "the bird" at some time or other. Oddly enough we were not in fear of this when appearing in the East End, but were in holy

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dread of it when we opened at the Palace, Manchester. In those days this was the rowdiest music hall in the Provinces. All that is changed now, and no one need fear an appearance there.

A kind friend told me that if you heard a penny drop, you would know that the "gods" were tossing the coin of fate. "Heads" you got the bird, "Tails" you didn't.

It was my hard lot to go in front of a cloth all alone to sing *The Flower Girl*. The Palace, Manchester, is a very large building, I had a very small voice then—added to that, the audience had become restive during the very pretty, but for them rather too elusive quartette, *Beverages*.

I got through the first verse and halfway through the first chorus, when I heard the clink of a penny. I wished that history would repeat itself and a little accident of catching fire (owing to a firework cracker's exploding and setting my Sleep-walking gown alight in the Macbeth skit) would occur again, when I might hope for the prompt action of the stage-manager to extinguish

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me. How infinitely preferable that would be to extinction owing to an acute attack of "the bird." I seemed to hear the rustle of his wings, and in fancy his derisive note pierced my ears. No—I had finished the song—I was making my exit unharmed—that penny must have turned up tails.

The one and only time the Follies were booed in London was when Harry had undertaken to put on a new show at the Apollo at terribly short notice. We had just over a week to prepare it. He ought to have said "No," but he loved a task and said "Yes" instead. The first part—the vaudeville—was good, and all was well; but the second—the potted plays and burlesque—was under-rehearsed and vague, in fact n.g. The gallery booed; the pit joined in. Harry, in a sporting spirit, told us to boo back; but we had allowed the audience to lose their sense of humour. They did not realize it was meant as a joke, and became more than unfriendly.

That Christmas, the sad time of distress and discouragement, began, for Harry was starting his fatal illness. The pantomime

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of *Aladdin* to which he had given such work and enthusiasm, and to which all of us had given hours of labour, failed to please,—one of those unaccountable things that happen in theatrical annals. The music was good, the scenery was really beautiful, the cast were all the old favourites. I think it was because Harry himself was tired and ill, for undoubtedly he was the moving spirit of the Follies; when his apparently inexhaustible fund of humour and vitality failed him, they all failed. He was ill all the following year, though manfully struggling to carry on. Finally he succumbed to my plea that he should take a holiday and chose Hythe, where he had never been since he was a boy at school there.

He grew very much worse; my mother came to help me nurse him and we hoped he would get better. Alas! before I realized how ill he was, I had lost him, and Anthony was never to know his big, lovable father, never to feel the force of his irresistible personality, never to have the privilege of paying tribute to the genius of laughter.*

* Dr. C. W. Saleeby, in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Oct. 10th, 1913, referred to H. G. P. as "The Genius of Laughter."

CHAPTER IV

"OUT OF WORK" AND "IN"

I was now, through the loss of my husband, one of the many who are "looking for work." I wrote to all the managers for interviews. I tried to persuade each one I saw that it would be immensely to his advantage to engage me as a member of his company, but with no success.

I was discouraged. Practically every manager in London had been kind enough to see me and so far every one of them had come to the conclusion that he had nothing whatever to offer me.

My Folly training—invaluable though it was to be in the future—left me at that time in rather the position of the "tweenie" who feels that neither kitchen work nor housework is her job. I had only been a short time on the stage. I was neither an actress nor a musical comedy artist, nor experienced enough in "Folly" work to be of any real value in that line.

I tried to get an engagement as Gladys

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Cooper's understudy in *Diplomacy*. I recall a whole week of that see-saw state of uncertainty which it is one's fate to experience during the time of being considered for a part; you wake up in the morning full of hope, the day is spent in alternate waves of optimism and pessimism, you go to sleep to dream it all over again. At the end of a week I came down with a bump.

"No, Miss Compton, sorry to have kept you waiting about, but you are too young for the part."

And I had a suspicion that the speaker, Sir Gerald du Maurier, thought me too fat for it.

I went through the agony of reading a part on approval at the Haymarket. The play was Jerome's *Robina in Search of a Husband*. Had I been a successful candidate I should have met my husband, Leon Quartermaine, in that production, but it was not to be: the Haymarket, which was afterwards to be my happy home, would have nothing to do with me then, I felt an atmosphere of disapproval,

and a conviction that the ruling powers considered me a terrible young woman.

As I said before, I was becoming discouraged ; almost everybody had seen me but no one was at all interested in me. Was my career to end almost as soon as it had begun ?

I trudged off to see Arthur Bouchier, feeling, “What’s the use ? he will be bored to death with me too,” but there I was wrong. Mr. Bouchier was the exception. I am by no means the only young artist looking for work whom he has helped to an engagement. I know of many, and there must be many more that I do not know of.

Feeling that he was interested, I chatted happily to him of what I had done and what I hoped to do once I could get started again.

“Meyer wants a pretty flapper,” he said, “I think you’ll do.” He ’phoned Louis Meyer there and then, arranging an appointment for me the following day.

I went to that interview grateful to Mr. Bouchier and absolutely determined to get the engagement.

Mr. Meyer was charming. Yes, I was

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the type, and the shock of hearing that was rather unnerving. Terms? Yes, these could be arranged satisfactorily. I felt a little weaker; there was only one thing—I braced myself—could I speak German? With a supreme effort of will and imagination I replied:

“Speak German? Certainly—like a native,” and hoped that the part contained only a few words in that tongue.

“Then I think everything can be arranged.”

I tried to give a convincing imitation of not being surprised by this happy conclusion.

“I will send on your contract.” I almost gasped with relief. “Rehearsal at 10.30 to-morrow.” I sat up very alert and bright, and my attitude expressed the will to work. “Oh, here is the part, you had better look over it and . . .”

The part he handed me was written entirely in German! That was a dreadful moment! French I could have managed easily, of Italian I had a smattering, but of German I knew not one word! Why had I avoided German? My hand shook as

I turned over the pages with an assumption of nonchalance ; I am sure my voice must have trembled as I rolled the part up and said, with what I hoped was an air of finality :

“ Oh, yes, that will be quite easy,” and rose, praying that he might not ask me to read it. There was an awful minute of suspense, while he considered me gravely.

“ Will you please——” my heart sank ; I held my breath—it was coming—the request for me to open that part and betray my utter ignorance of the German language—“ leave your address and 'phone number with my secretary as you go through. Good morning, Miss Compton.”

I walked out of the door in a dream, did as I was bid, and found myself sitting in the tube murmuring, “ By to-morrow at 10.30 I must be a German ” ; and I was.

By great good fortune I found my eldest sister at home. She was no use to me herself as a linguist, but she had just come from giving an elocution lesson at a little school owned by a German lady. Having explained my dilemma I was escorted round

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the corner, introduced to Fräulein S—who, kindness itself, rose to the occasion and for several hours patiently instilled into me the meaning of the lines and their Hanoverian pronunciation.

I sat up far into the night, and the next morning at rehearsal I was able to remember both meaning and accent, and in the afternoon I signed my contract to appear as Anise in *Who's the Lady?* at the Garrick Theatre under the management of Louis Meyer. Mr. Meyer is no longer alive, I regret to say. He was full of consideration for his artists and a delightful manager to work for.

Now Anise was a small part and she had long waits ; these were profitably employed by me in sewing. While so engaged one evening I heard in tones of anxiety from below, "You're off, the stage is waiting." I turned to my companion in the dressing-room : "Someone off ; oh, dear, what a pity." Renewed sounds of "Stage waiting, hurry up, you're off." From me, threading my needle, "Oh, poor thing, how awful she'll feel when she

gets on the stage." Louder shouts, and footsteps coming up the stairs. "Come along quick—stage waiting." Leisurely I began to stitch, saying, "The stage has been waiting quite a long time now; who can it be—whatever are they thinking of?" The door burst open to admit the frenzied A.S.M. breathless and gesticulating—"Anise—Anise, you're off—Stage . . ." I pricked my finger, I dropped my work, I was out of the door, down the stairs and on the stage, having caused one of the longest waits on record.

Towards the end of the run of *Who's the Lady?* Mr. Courtneidge to my astonishment and delight made me an offer to play the name part in *The Pearl Girl*. To be sure I was not to create the part, but succeed the understudy who had followed Marie Blanche, who had followed Iris Hoey, who was of course the original. Nevertheless, it was a great chance for me, a good part, and Mr. Courtneidge himself would coach me. Everything was settled for me to begin rehearsing and I felt terribly ill, not because I was engaged to

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play a long leading part in musical comedy, had eight numbers to sing, and several dances to learn, but because I really was ill, and had been feeling so for weeks, but had not the courage to go to the doctor.

During one matinée I felt so terrible I went to the Stage Manager and asked if I might be off that night. It happened, unfortunately, that my understudy was away that day, also it happened unfortunately that I had pretended to feel well so long that now when I admitted to feeling ill everyone told me it was my imagination. My dresser came to my aid.

“ Well, miss, there’s no denying with that natural high colour of yours you look well enough, but you don’t feel it, I know that ; you take my advice and go and see your doctor ; there’ll be no arguments once you’ve seen the doctor.”

I took her advice, and against his, for he told me I had a bad internal abscess, I played that night with a temperature of 104 degrees, and had to be taken out of the theatre on a stretcher to be operated on at once.

CHAPTER V

ANGLO-AMERICAN

After my illness I was allowed a week's rest at Brighton to recoup my working powers, and then I came back to one week's strenuous rehearsal—and one week only—before taking up the name part in *The Pearl Girl*. The part, the songs, the dances, the steps, the numbers, the lines, what a whirl of a week, and the indefatigable Mr. Courtneidge teaching, helping and encouraging me every moment of it. How I should have managed all those dances if it had not been for Lauri de Frece I don't know. With infinite patience he went over them with me time after time, gave me invaluable tips to help me in remembering and rendering them, and when the time came got me through them before an audience.

Add to the ordinary work of getting up a leading part in musical comedy the usual accompaniment of dress fittings, visits to the photographer, an interview or so with the press. What usually takes five or six

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weeks' work was in this case crushed into one, and even an American born and bred must admit that we do get a move on in England sometimes.

So short had been the time of preparation that I spent all the remaining run of *The Pearl Girl* in working hard at my singing and dancing, but all through I had Mr. Courtneidge's wonderful powers of coaching to help and guide me.

You see that for the second time I was more than lucky, for no more valuable introduction to musical comedy could I have had than under Mr. Courtneidge's management. I was very happy at the Shaftesbury ; it was there that I met Cicely Courtneidge, and we formed a friendship that has continued all these years and will continue into the years to come ; it was there that I came to know that very charming man, Harry Welchman, to admire his work and his never failing enthusiasm for it ; it was there that Lauri de Frece became a most helpful partner to me in my work and we decided to take on a longer partnership together.

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While playing in *The Pearl Girl* I rehearsed for *The Cinema Star*, and went off on tour with it ; a few weeks later Lauri settled to go to America in *To-night's the Night*. "To-day's the day for me to write and say I want to go too," said I to myself. "But," said Mr. Grossmith, "we don't want you ; there's no part for you." Said Mr. Courtneidge, "I *do* want you, I *have* a part for you." Said I, "I want to go to America." Said the Fates, "We will arrange it," and true to their word, though at the last moment, they did.

Miss Emmie Campten, who was engaged for the part of Victorine, was ill and had to give it up ; rather against his will, I fear, Mr. Grossmith engaged me in her place, also rather against his will, I fear, Mr. Courtneidge released me. Another quick rush of getting ready to sail combined with rehearsals for the new show and then when in the train at Euston, as is so often the case with all of us, I began to wonder whether I did want to go to America so much after all, and whether the excitement of a voyage and the interest of exploring a new country

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would compensate for the pain of saying good-bye to my little Anthony while handing his dear two year old self into his grandmother's loving care.

Did I say excitement of a voyage? Well, I didn't know then that I was a very bad sailor and that the Lapland, during wartime, with no cargo, was to have a very rough crossing. Still, I recovered at last, and groped on deck to renew my acquaintance with what really was a star cast—George Grossmith, Maurice Farkoa, Jimmy Blakeley, Davy Burnaby, Iris Hoey, Emmy Wehlen, and amongst the small part artists, Madge Saunders, Ethel Baird, Robert Nainby and Leslie Henson—and hiding in the chorus, Gypsy O'Brien, Peggy Kurton and Adrah Fair.

It's wonderful how ill one can be at the beginning of a voyage and how well by the end; I had a very jolly time for the last few days. I remember an exciting game of deck quoits, during which the heel of my shoe went overboard, so as I had packed nearly everything in those large trunks marked "Hold," and had left but a small

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supply for "Cabin," Iris came to my rescue with a pair of black suède shoes in which I finished the journey.

Some very wealthy friends of ours had said: "Going to New York? You must stay at the Astor—such a nice comfortable little hotel." Accordingly we had booked a suite. After having duly admired New York's skyline and the Statue of Liberty, we found ourselves almost in a state of arrest while our goods and chattels went through the Customs. Many reporters came up, bade us welcome to the city and asked our opinion of it; we felt it rather early to reply, not having even driven through it, but our first impressions of New York appeared in the papers the next morning and most rosy they were. We learnt that everything—buildings, people, business methods, civic organization—had won our unbounded admiration.

Imagine our discomfiture when we arrived at the Hotel Astor and came into an enormous lounge large enough to accommodate hundreds of people either staying in the hotel or not, to say nothing of

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a little bevy of shops. We heard the strange cries of the bell-hops trying to trace a stray visitor amongst the crowd ; we felt our ' grips ' whisked away from us by porters, and never expected to see the former again ; we threaded our way to innumerable desks and finally learnt that our rooms were on the twenty-fourth floor ! The central heating after the cold outside was a little trying, and as we walked to the " elevators " the ground floor seemed to rise at me and I wondered how I should feel when I got to the twenty-fourth ; had I known of the sickening thrill at the start of the ascent and the ghastly lurch of arrival as we were shot up " express " from floor to roof, I should have walked even two dozen stories rather than go through this experience. When we arrived on the twenty-fourth floor, we walked giddily into what we had looked forward to as a cosy little home for a few weeks, and we found ourselves in a spacious Louis Quinze drawing-room with companion rooms to match ; very expensive, very impressive, very *comme il faut*, but very uncomfortable.



Photo by]

FAY COMPTON IN "SECRETS"

[Betham Park

CHAPTER VI

IN AMERICA

We are in New York ; we must hurry—no time to lament over the awful dignity, the mighty grandeur of our suite, time though to make a mental note that when we could find a humbler and more comfortable style of abode to retire to that we would do so. Meantime let us enjoy the privileges of our palace : take a glimpse at all the “ roofs ” around us and the street far below ; almost we have the advantage of one in an aeroplane, perched so high are we. We are in a position to describe New York from the air, with none of the dangers or discomforts of a flight. We must take a very long walk to the furthest point of our domain, finding that fascinating, delightful and most truly American portion of it—the bathroom ; and very quickly we endeavour to take in all its intriguing “ patents ” and contrivances for comfort, warmth, and speed in bathing.

Returning, we wonder if we dare operate the small switchboard in our hall ; appar-

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ently by its kind offices we could, in a few seconds, speak to any part of the hotel, and in a few minutes to any part of America.

Hypnotized, we have pressed a button. What have we rung for?—of that we are ignorant. “Quick, invent something.” No time! Then a chinkling and a tinkling and a rap at the door.

“Of course, this is what we rang for—what one always rings for in America—Ice Water!” and here, upon a tray held by a diminutive page boy, here it is. How soothing and cooling; forget how bad for digestion and complexion. A heavy tread, another knock; we open the door, not to a “blonde young giant” as heroes on the films in America are so often described, but to a bronze Hercules, the negro vanguard of the American Express, and an express service we must admit it to be. Here is all our luggage. “Bustle, bustle”—we can get unpacked, changed, bathed, dressed all in a moment if only—ah, there she is; a timid tap—enter Eva. I was wondering how long these rambling reminiscences of mine could go on without mention of Eva; had you

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met me through any other medium than that of the printed page, you would have met Eva long before this. Eva is my maid, Eva has taken care of me, put up with me and done everything under the sun for me, ever since I went to America some few years ago. Now I am full of faults; very often through the long periods of "rush work" that fall to my lot I am excessively nervy, but call me what you will, say temperamental and mean bad-tempered, I will not excuse myself—I will but call upon Eva, as counsel for my defence and proof positive, that through the vicissitudes of first nights and during first nerve-racking moments "on the floor" of the Moving Picture Studio, under the stress of arduous periods of rehearsal, and before the steady grind of the camera, it has not been impossible for her to bear with me or to contemplate doing so still.

At the Hotel Astor on that first evening, as many times since with Eva's assistance, I was changed and dressed at lightning speed. Eva seemed to understand the switchboard perfectly and very soon ascertained that Viola (I forgot to say that my two sisters

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had stolen a march on me and preceded me to America; probably by now they both spoke with an American accent), was coming down town to see me that evening, and that Kay would be on hand to show me the sights of the city the next day.

This was good news, and the thought of seeing my own kith and kin helped me to bear up through the somewhat appalling ordeal of dinner in the Astor—such a huge restaurant, so many people of so many different nationalities, a puzzling quantity of novel dishes to choose from, waiters like so many wasps ready to sting you to instant decision, the clashing, banging, restless unfamiliar syncopated strains of the orchestra. I confess to being glad when it was over and we could wend our way down a wide corridor termed Peacock's Alley and seek the calm of our own apartments.

And there waiting for us was Viola and her twin—her son really, but in those days so like her as to earn that designation. I daresay we made as much noise as the chatter and orchestra below, with our exchange of news and our method of both talking and

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laughing at once. We had to compare the "improvement" of Nicky with that of the six months older Anthony. I can't help finding a little disconcerting the way in which small children seem to be under a bounden duty to have "improved" any and every time a relative or friend sees them. One begins to think eventually, that one's progeny must have commenced as a very low species of humanity both physically and mentally, in order to have been able to go on improving so much and so often without attaining a degree of perfection that would render him or her too rare and fine a product for this poor world.

I was relieved to find Viola as English as ever, but very helpful, having learnt the ropes as it were and acquired confidence thereby. A saunter to the elevator and a calm statement of the floor required, a nonchalant stroll through the lounge, and we were gazing at the lights on Broadway, then my Americo-Anglican sister casually informed me that she and Nick must be getting up town to her little "apartment" at two hundred and something street, by

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means of a cross-town pay-as-you-enter surface car, a brief dip into the subway, and a short ride on the L.

"On the what?" My eldest sister's language is wont to be circumspect—"the 'ell?"

"Yes, you know, the Elevated Railway."

"Oh, of course." I murmured something about a taxi; it seemed such a long and tortuous journey.

"Taxi? In New York? Oh, no, only for millionaires!" I found that to be true, and when I visited Viola in her very attractive, labour saving and convenient flat—I should say apartment—I managed to grapple with Car, Sub and L and arrive triumphant in the far north-west of the city.

We rehearsed in New York, and on the first day at the Madison Square Theatre; I think I am right in saying that it had not been played in since the murder took place there. I must be right, and I think it can't have been used at all, for the dust on the stage was, without any exaggeration, three inches thick!

We "tried out" at pretty little New-

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haven, Conn. Despair entered into the souls of all of us. We were no good—the play, the music, the dances, everything was utterly and hopelessly bad. Worst of all, most flagrant blot upon the production was one Victoria who, after the first night, was in floods of tears and full of resolves to leave the stage.

We opened in New York, and strange metamorphosis, all was bright and cheerful. The audience liked us, our libretto, our dancing and our singing, they even seemed to like that error of judgment, myself, as “Victoria.”

“There,” said that very dear Maurice Farkoa, “what did I tell you? You’re making a success!”

What a delightful man, and what an artist! One could learn much more than one was able to learn, in watching him sing one verse, or one chorus.

“Now, what’s all this nonsense about being a failure?” from that old darling, Jimmy Blakeley; “go on and take your encore, you silly little thing!”

I lay in bed afterwards and half thought,

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half dreamt, of all the terrible things the dreaded American Press would have to say about me. I read countless awful descriptions, hauntingly insulting paragraphs. I woke to the sight of a mass of newspapers, from behind which came the voice of Eva chirping :

“Wake up, Madam, splendid notices—read them all.” I rescued Eva from suffocation and to my surprise read a series of some of the best Press notices I’ve ever had, and what was much more important, good notices of the production leading to a three months’ run in New York.

Time enough to be English and leisurely, to see everything by degrees. I remember a priceless walk with my second sister on Riverside Drive. Unfortunately we had chosen the wrong day for it; a wild north-west wind was blowing, never have I been so cold.

How warm it had been indoors, how many extra clothes I had put on to ensure warmth when out, all to no purpose. The wind cut our faces, tears poured down our cheeks, our hands froze, our feet were lumps of ice.

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"I know," said Kay by way of an endeavour to cheer us up, "we'll go into this drug store and thaw, get quite warm and then we shall be all right."

We did so. Painfully the circulation returned; then we could not resist the temptation of the soda fountain and partook each of a large and generous ice cream soda. Refreshed we again sought the banks of the Hudson and wondered why our visit to the drug store had not had the beneficial effect we had expected of it. Soon we were as cold as ever and cold inside too! Could it be the ice cream soda?

Lauri and I soon moved from the Astor to the Algonquin, which was a smaller, cosier hotel and very much to our liking. Of it my two chief memories are Douglas Fairbanks, and taking poison—no connection between the two, I assure you.

Fairbanks was, of course, most entertaining and used to do conjuring tricks for me by the hour in the rather frequent times when I was suffering from homesickness—for Viola had migrated to Boston and Kay had gone off "on the road"; Douglas

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Fairbanks junr. was there too, quite a small boy then, known as Buddy.

The taking of poison was purely accidental—not suicidal—and through carelessness on my part. I didn't switch on the light : my medicine bottle and the Lysol bottle were fatally alike. I took a generous dose from the latter, and as soon as I had swallowed it my throat seemed on fire. Mercifully Eva was there to send for a doctor. He gave me whisky as an antidote, huge glasses of neat whisky ! Eva tells me we spent a strange evening consisting of my lying down for five minutes, then of my getting up and insisting on playing and singing to her ; then demanding cups of tea ; then lying down again ; more music, more tea, and so on for hours. Eventually the Lysolic and alcoholic effects wore off and I recovered.

No visit to New York is complete without one to Coney Island. We went, Lauri and myself, Jerome D. Kern and his wife. Imagine yourself at Wembley, only more so ; visit every switchback scenic railway and contrivance for creating discomfort and

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mirth ; eat hot-dogs, ice cream cones and clam chowder, come back to a supper of lobster salad, and you will not wonder, as I did, at feeling ill. But it was glorious fun.

At the end of the New York season Mr. Grossmith and certain others went back to London, while Lauri took the production on to Boston, and a short tour. I liked Boston much better than New York, and though I could not take to Boston baked beans and brown bread, I did take to my heart a darling Boston bull, name of "Henry" ; he had a black eye and a loving disposition. In Boston there occurred a distressing instance of swank on the part of Ethel Baird and myself—under the influence of Boston in spring time we became enamoured of a desire to ride. I had not done so for about eight or ten years, and Ethel not for longer ago than that. Nevertheless we approached each other jauntily : " Do you ride ? "

" Oh, yes, quite a bit."

" So do I. Fine. Shall we hire a couple of hacks ? " " Sure thing. Togs ? " " Oh any old rigout." And any old rigout it was.

We had no top boots and had to borrow a

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shirt each from Lauri, and we bought a couple of Trilby hats. The riding school lent Ethel a pair of breeches and me a side-saddle skirt. Our hats were too small so we wore our hair down. Instead of top-boots we bought puttees and wore our own high-heeled shoes !

The daring Ethel rode astride. We managed to mount and to stay on during a stately walk to the Park. Once there I turned my attention very earnestly towards gripping the pummel, but poor Ethel had none. She must have tried to bluff a security she did not feel, for in a tone of enforced brightness she observed :

“Lovely day, birds singing, spring—so——”

I turned round to agree, but I could not see her !—she had slipped off momentarily and was enjoying a sight of buds and bulbs from terra firma. Nothing daunted, and chuckling, on she got again, and all went comparatively well till we turned for home. The riding master rode a nag born to lead. It bolted. We followed. By a miracle we struck through the Park down Boston’s

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widest 'avenue.' Ethel's long fair hair floated in the breeze, and thoughts of Lady Godiva became entangled in my English-American mind with the adventures of John Gilpin and Paul Revere. "Mustn't fall off," I murmured to myself, and reflected that at this rate unpremeditated pursuit of the nag in front could not last long; we reached the trams and traffic. On we sped. Even the giant police of Boston could not stop us until we arrived dishevelled, panting, and in fits of laughter, at the riding school.

From Boston we went to Philadelphia, and Providence (short visits all of these) and to the Harmonious Bleekers Hall, Albany, N.Y.—its name is not a happy one for it is possessed of the very worst acoustic properties I have ever experienced, and all sounds therein must be unharmonious.

We all became very depressed about this. After one of the performances during which we gathered the impression that our audience could not hear the sound of us and did not like the look of us, a longing for home

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and England came upon us, and we repaired to an armchair restaurant. There upon the large arm which forms a table, we each placed a votive offering of a bowl of bread and milk.

Returned to New York, Lauri and I received an offer for a revue in which Maurice and Florence Walton were the dancing stars, supported by an entirely American company and ourselves.

I was asked to become Irish and sing with a pronounced brogue. My Scots descent had never asserted itself before ; but it did then, try as I might to be Irish I could not keep out the Scots. They say that a mixture of Scotch and Irish is fatal. Perhaps this was one of the reasons for the complete failure of the try-out. Anyway, while arrangements were being made to rewrite the revue and try again, I got an offer to play (*The Only Girl*) in London, and back we came in the first boat we could get.

The boat was the *New York*. Lauri had contracted a passion for Jazz instruments ; from every place we had been he had col-

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lected many and varied specimens. When we were going aboard the porters were heard to remark, "Who is this guy? Does he play them or travel for them?"

We had one of those thrilling war-time crossings when we were constantly commanded to put on our life-belts. Ethel would insist on sitting up all night wearing hers, even before we reached the danger zone! All the same, we had great fun and enjoyed the return trip tremendously. We celebrated the last day by a long game of Follow-my-Leader. I was the last, and the final "follow" that had been thought out for us was that of opening the door of an old lady's state-room and closing it again, but as I was the last, and the old lady had become exasperated, it was she who closed the door on me after giving me a stinging smack in the face.

I wish I could conjure up for you a picture as we neared shore, of the white cliffs of Dover and the sun shining upon them. However, it wasn't Dover but Liverpool, so you know it is sure to have welcomed us with fog or rain. We didn't mind though ;

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we were safe home again, and it was lovely to be back, driving through all the familiar London streets and to find an excited little boy jigging up and down with joy at seeing me, as I used to jump for joy when my father and mother came home from tour. .

CHAPTER VII

EXIT FROM MUSICAL COMEDY

The day after we arrived in England again, I went to interview Messrs. Grossmith and Laurillard on the subject of their cable to me in America.

Delightful to receive an offer at all, and there is an especial thrill to one by cable. It has only happened to me twice; the second was from Ziegfeld, and went to show that my efforts as an American revue artist had not had the disastrous effect on the managerial world I had feared. But to resume, Mr. Grossmith outlined the part to me, and it sounded a very charming one, but—and it was a very big but—vocally it was far more ambitious than anything I had ever undertaken, or contemplated undertaking. The big song was really a very difficult one, and departed into the terrifying region known as “alt.”

With a cheery smile Mr. Grossmith asked me if I thought I could manage the singing. “I don’t expect so, but I’ll try,” was my

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reply, and I questioned, "How long shall we be rehearsing?" "Six weeks." Accordingly every day for six weeks I went to Hermann Klein for a singing lesson and I practised—and of course I rehearsed.

Mr. Klein did not turn me into a marvelous prima donna, but he made it possible for me to sing the songs and fulfil the engagement. That was an instance of what hard work and a good teacher will do for you if you give them the chance. Kenneth Douglas was charming to act with, and I got great help from that very gifted producer, Sydney Ellison, who is well known, not only as producer of *The Only Girl*, but of many successes of Curzon's before that, and several others in the musical comedy world since. I am sorry to say he has been terribly ill and unable to carry on with that important side of our work for which he has such real talent. Also in the cast with me were my old friends, Ethel Baird, who made a well-deserved and enormous success, that valued Co-Optimist, Davy Burnaby, and a new friend, Mabel Russell, now Mrs. Hilton Phillipson, M.P. I will tell you in confi-

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dence that our M.P. had one fault. I hope that if we ever have another election you will not take a base advantage of the trust I place in you and heckle her with this inside information. She *would* "keep the curtain down." For some reason or another it was constantly impossible for her to be dressed in time. We all became a little marked with her on this score—and I went so far as to tell her it was a thing I abhorred, an act of inconsideration to the audience of which I had never been and would never be, guilty. Rash statement ! A day or two after I had uttered it, I motored from our house in Maidenhead to Gertie Millar's house six miles farther away from London. There was a muddle about the cars. Lauri thought I was having Gertie's, and Gertie thought I was using our own. I had enjoyed my visit—as I always did—and was busy sipping a cup of tea when my hostess asked me, "Is your car here yet ?" "Oh, no, you're sending me aren't you ?" "My dear, some mistake, my car's away to-day !" My heart missed a beat. We 'phoned, we implored and entreated in vain—not a car

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could we beg, hire or abduct. A form of chariot race to the station took place in Gertie's dog cart. I fell into a train—a slow one, of course. In that agonized state of hurry when you move forward and the world stands still, I sat in the railway carriage and thought of my boast to Mabel.

The train crawled into Paddington fifteen minutes before the curtain was due to go up. I hurled myself into a taxi, and in frenzied tones demanded of the driver both speed and ingenuity. Some officials gazed with suspicion at my distraught countenance. As I undid in the taxi all that I could with safety, of my clothing, I hoped that I was not pursued, for were a detective on my track, and were I discovered in the favourite pastime of "crooks," that of changing clothes and make-up while in a cab or train, heaven knows what delay might be caused ! While my whole body propelled that taxi to the theatre I peeped through the little window at the back and seeing no sign of detectives, breathed again and thought once more of Mabel. I wonder who paid that taxi. I didn't. I got to the theatre three

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minutes before the curtain was due to rise, my understudy was dressed and waiting. I gasped, "I shall be in time," disappeared into the dressing-room, and (Eva says she doesn't know how we did it) at the end of the three minutes I emerged dressed and made-up and walked on to the stage without keeping the curtain down!

I wonder if—well, after all there's no curtain in the House of Commons.

The Only Girl was neither a success nor a failure. After its London run the play went on tour, and on the halls the joys of playing twice a night and three matinées a week were mine once more.

I recall a little incident at Manchester, which in its revelations of a different point of view, caused me to chuckle. Most of the principals were staying at the Midland. Ethel and I had a room and bath—and three or four of the ladies of the chorus had a suite each. It was Christmas time, and war-time notwithstanding, the Midland had as usual succeeded in bringing about an atmosphere of intense gaiety and good cheer. The tables groaned under the

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weight of Christmas fare, the rooms teemed with happy laughing guests.

Among them, though, we came to four seats, and in them four unhappy-looking and sombre figures clothed in black—the members of the chorus with a suite each and every luxury they wished. I asked the reason of their woe. With faltering voices and with sighs they sobbed out the answer to my question. “We never knew it would be like this; we’ve never been on tour before.” I reflected that our next engagement was at Liverpool; there they would stay at the Midland Adelphi and suffer more pangs of privation. Poor souls, I was not there to witness their distress. An offer for Lauri and myself in a revue prevented my doing so.

Back I came to London to join the cast of *Follow the Crowd* at the Empire.

Let me say at once I did not like revue and revue did not like me.

To begin with, the disjointed study to me is tiresome. Then there is of necessity no continuity of plot in a revue. I love to see them, but I hope never to be in one again,

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unless it should be of the "intimate" variety.

And so, with the finish of the run of *Follow the Crowd*, I follow the crowd into musical work no more ; but, as I make my exit, I wave a grateful farewell to all the clever artists I met, to all the producers I worked under, and to musical comedy itself which taught me so much that I could not have learnt elsewhere.

CHAPTER VIII

DEDICATED TO TWO FAILURES

I wonder if either public or actors and actresses are duly grateful to the plays that are failures.

Think ! If all the plays produced were successes and ran for months and years, how very much fewer plays there would be to see, how very much fewer parts there would be to play. I am not denying for a moment the happy satisfaction of being in a big success, the constant tonic of full and appreciative houses, the help it is to play to a theatre full of people who have come to see a play because it is a success and who, before the curtain goes up, have fully made up their minds to enjoy themselves ; but, at the same time, I realize that a failure puts us on our mettle, calls for a fight, causes us to make an effort to turn failure into success—and even if we are still concerned in a losing battle, and suffer ultimate defeat, surely the struggle will have been good for our work and of benefit to the public we serve.

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The two failures I have in my mind now are *The Boomerang* and *Sheila*. Thanks to them I had an opportunity of playing a charming light comedy part and a beautiful emotional one within a few months, for *The Boomerang* had a very short run, and poor *Sheila* ran only three weeks, one reason for its failure being that the daylight air-raids started just after its production when of course all theatrical business was very badly knocked for a time.

As there is every bit as much preparation for a failure as for a success, the intensive effort of concentration that accompanies creating a part was my privilege twice over in a short space of time—the work of studying not only the words of a new part but the thoughts and feelings of a being that has been created on paper for us, a being into whom we must try to put the breath of life for our audiences, who through us must walk out of those typewritten pages on to the stage, not only to say the words written by, but to be the creature of the author's vision. That is what we actors and actresses are striving to do all the time—very often we do

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not succeed—therefore I say thank you to the failures that give us the opportunity of trying and trying again.

And how came it that I was so fortunate as to be entrusted with two such delightful parts in a branch of work with which I had been dissociated for some time? How did it happen that I was allowed to leave musical comedy and revue and step straight into a leading part on what is known as the “legitimate” stage? It was through the influence of a very dear friend of mine—who was a very dear friend of my father’s—Mr. R. Golding Bright. He had watched my career hitherto and had evidently come to the conclusion that I should do well to go back to the realms of “straight” work, with which my father and mother, grandfathers and grandmothers, great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers had all been connected. Golding Bright being a man of very shrewd judgment, far seeing, and known to the world of theatrical management as such, was able to do for me what I never could have done for myself, namely, convince the managerial world that though I had devoted

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nearly all my time till then to musical work, I was capable of playing parts of a different type. From that time on Mr. Bright has been my adviser on all business matters relating to my profession ; through him all my offers are accepted or refused, and without his valued advice I would not sign a contract even for the salary Jackie Coogan can command.

When I made this break—an important one in my career—from musical comedy, I was very doubtful of my powers to make good ; Mr. Bright's confidence in me gave me confidence in myself—he was such a stern critic of my work that I felt secure in accepting his praise when it came. I was very lucky ; I keep telling you of my good luck, and I have had a great deal of it, but I have worked hard too. In *The Boomerang* my luck asserted itself, for the producer under whose guidance I came was the late Sir Charles Hawtrey.

We all know that as an actor, especially in the difficult task of playing light comedy, there never was a finer exponent of the art that conceals art. To be in a play he

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was producing meant that one was able to form some slight conception of the means whereby he made his effects and scored such enormous successes. In addition to being a wonderful actor he was a fine producer and did not hesitate to give, and give generously, of his own store of knowledge to the members of the company he was directing.

Another very happy circumstance of *The Boomerang* was that much of the work I had to do was with Kenneth Douglas, also a charming exponent of light comedy. He was very delightful to act with, and most helpful. It is sad to think that the stage was deprived of so excellent an actor as Kenneth Douglas while he was still a comparatively young man.

I made the acquaintance of my real Christian name in this play, for the girl I played was called Virginia ! Poor Virginia did not live very long, but she taught me a lot in her short life, and the endeavour I devoted both to her and Sheila has since proved to me the proof of my mother's maxim, "No work is wasted."

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Sheila was a beautiful part. I loved her, and I loved being at the St. James's. I've referred before to the wonderful atmosphere of courtesy and consideration in that theatre under the ownership and management of Sir George Alexander. It was wonderful to find the hope, expressed to me by Sir George before I ever went on the stage, that I should one day play in his theatre, fulfilled. Sir George produced the play, and though very ill at the time, was everything that a fine director could be to us all—full of suggestions, perseverance, patience, encouragement, enthusiasm—and, as one knows now, he was suffering terribly. Sheila was a part full of emotional opportunity; this I tried to realize to the full, and my task was lightened by meeting and knowing Miss Sowerby, the clever authoress of the play. In it, as the leading man, was Aubrey Smith, whose own beautiful performance was of a quality to inspire anyone privileged to act with him.

How disappointed we were when we knew how short a time was ours to enjoy playing in sympathy, how glad we were when

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several years after we met at the Royalty to play "opposite" each other once more, in *Cæsar's Wife*; then we had the joy of playing two beautiful parts for a long run. Nevertheless Aubrey still calls me *Sheila*.

CHAPTER IX

AT THE SAVOY THEATRE

“ Another exploit of the cat burglar,” are the words frequently seen on the newspaper placards nowadays. They remind me of a time when we thought the house was being robbed, and our own actions might have led to us being apprehended as cat burglars.

One very sultry evening during a hot summer, I came home rather weary and jaded under the combined effect of heat and two performances. In the drawing-room I found a great friend of mine, Gladys Gunn, now Mrs. Leslie Henson, who awaited my homecoming with impatience as she had brought some bathing dresses for us to try on. We agreed that the promised cool of the evening had not yet found fulfilment. What could be more attractive than to change into the cool of a bathing dress for a light supper? We carried out our plan, and my second sister, who was staying with me, hearing mention of food, joined us, in a kimono.

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Gladys and I were not long in changing, and the three of us were just going down to have our meal when we heard sounds coming from the dining-room, strange, alarming, foreign—burglars! We were all much frightened; we all pretended to be very brave. The disquieting sounds continued; a creaking of footsteps, a clattering of dishes and glasses, faint but terrifying. The burglars were eating our supper. We held a whispered conference.

One rash spirit suggested a bold descent to the dining-room floor to 'phone. Fortunately the other two did not call her bluff, and their sotto voce protests were willingly heeded. Swiftly we came to a Napoleonic decision: one of the trio should effect a stealthy exit from the drawing-room French windows on the balcony and see if a policeman was near. Trembling I found myself on the balcony; of course no sign of a policeman—war-time. I volunteered further service if I could have a companion in courage. Gladys joined me, and impersonating cat burglars ourselves, climbed from one balcony to another till we reached the

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corner of the Square, when—oh, joy ! we saw a special constable.

He did not seem at all surprised by the apparition of two young women in swimming suits appearing as Juliets to his Romeo. We told him of our suspicions and he pulled himself together to help us. He suggested that we should return to No. 34, where in the space of three minutes he would follow and attract the attention of the burglars in order to frighten them into leaving the house. For a while he pondered over the method of doing so—a cough did not seem arresting enough, we agreed ; his pipe ! there was strategy : he would tap his pipe on the railings ; we were to remain in the drawing-room with the door locked. On no account must anyone be so foolhardy as to attempt an exit by the front door until the villain had been encouraged to escape. We clambered back, and found my anxious sister who had all this time been listening alone to the mysterious noises from downstairs.

We did as we were bid. The heavy tread of the P.C. was soon heard. With beating

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heart we listened for the tap of his pipe, almost as Billy Bones must have awaited the tap of Pew's stick. It came, it was repeated, there was no sound within—to the accompaniment of a loud cough it came again—still no sound of the burglars' hasty exit. We leant over the balcony rail to hear the brave man's husky whisper, "I'm coming in." We lowered the latch key and held our breath. He came in, he marched boldly into the dining-room—no one; all through the house he tramped—no one; up to the attics—no one! There were the sounds again. Following the direction whence they came, he solved the mystery. The house next door had been closed for the summer, but the owners had evidently come back late that evening and had been having their supper comfortably while we had been kept from ours in fear and trembling.

Let me see, when did that happen? I fancy it must have been during the happy times at the Savoy when I was with H. B. Irving, of whom I had heard terrible accounts as a manager before I went to him. How false they must have been was

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very soon apparent, and it was fun to contradict these untruthful statements both while I was under his management and after. Those were exciting times—a burglary during one run, and a terrible air raid during the next—bombs dropping in Arundel Street, and in the Strand. On one of these lively occasions H. B. dashed into my dressing-room with the words, “Fay, take cover.” I was very scantily clad at the moment and was inclined to resent his intrusion until I realized by the crowd of people dashing past the door toward our underground dressing-rooms that a raid was in progress. H. B. was delightful both as manager and actor—it was in the first play I was in under his management that I came to play my first part in a play by an author with whose works I was happy in becoming more and more familiar as the time went on. I won’t tell you the play (you’ll probably guess the author), for if I begin to talk about him and his plays I shall never stop, so I will safeguard myself by not even mentioning his name. It was during the run of the above play that a large party of us went one

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Sunday to do an entertainment for a big war charity. It was organized by a ridiculous woman who felt that actors and actresses were the goats of this world, and that as such they must be separated from the sheep of her own personal acquaintance. Accordingly we — Lauri, Melville Gideon, Gene Gerard, Billie Carlton, Lee White, Clay Smith, Beatrice Lillie and others, found ourselves placed at one end of the room, and far away at the other end were the lady's own friends and many young officers of the Air Force. Beatrice, who never could stop being funny for a moment either on or off the stage, became restive, and during a pause in the conversation turned to me with a menu and pencil in hand and asked me in the tone and manner of a reporter, "And how do you spend your mornings, Miss Compton?" I could not refrain from replying, "Signing picture postcards for the dear boys of the Air Force." The assembled pilots looped the loop, and the hostess crashed. However, she relented later and allowed us to mix with her friends and

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the Air Force, and we became a merry party.

Raids at the theatre on week-days during the run of *The Invisible Foe*, and raids of another kind on Sundays, for Beatrice Lillie, her mother and sister and myself had been foolish enough to take a house at Maidenhead just opposite Murray's Club. We had chosen the river to get a nice quiet time not too far away from London—but our peaceful Sundays were much disturbed by a constant stream of uninvited guests who overflowed from Murray's. Those I did not know I thought were Beattie's friends or her mother's. Those she did not know she thought were mine, and they, apparently, all knew both of us from childhood. They swung open our garden gate, lounged in our garden chairs, used our 'phone, ate our food, drank our wine, and eventually drove us away from our riverside retreat.

After my brief sojourn at the St. James's in *Sheila*, I had gone back again to H. B. in *The Invisible Foe*, a play of an eerie nature by my friend Walter Hackett. H. B. was always very intent on no noise during a per-

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formance, and more especially in this production, with its ghostly effects and moments of stillness to evoke the supernatural. It was as much as our lives were worth to cough ; did we do so, or exchange a whisper, the formidable Tom Reynolds would appear from nowhere, and as Mr. Irving's stage manager demand complete stillness. Did one sigh heavily the master carpenter would loom before one with an angry " hush " for Mr. Irving's sake. Did one tread heavily a distracted A.S.M. with piteous entreaty would beg for a noiseless stage on Mr. Irving's behalf. Presently Mr. Irving himself would make an exit with a heavy tread and, coughing loudly, he would pass through the swing door to the dressing-rooms, letting it bang behind him, after which he could be heard talking quite loudly to and laughing with one of the company. The dear man had no idea he was one of the noisiest people himself in the wings, but we were so fond of him that we never enlightened him, and preferred to please him by trying ourselves to preserve an unbroken silence.

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In *The Invisible Foe* I had a very interesting part, and one that I enjoyed playing greatly, though I found it frightening off the stage as well as on. Towards the end of the run when no future engagement appeared, I went to see Mr. Bright; he could hold out no hopes for me at the moment, and I emerged sadly from his office in Leicester Square. Everyone was looking up at the sky, so, of course, I did too and saw a German bombing plane. "Ah," thought I, "if just one little bomb fell here there would be no need to trouble about future engagements. How trivial all these things really are over which we work ourselves into such a great anxiety." And I went home determined to give less thought to myself and my own personal problems in future.

CHAPTER X

AN AMERICAN FARCE

"Fair and warmer to-morrow," was the constantly reiterated remark in the farce *Fair and Warmer* that had run so long and so successfully on Broadway. Its cheering note, however, did little to revive the drooping spirits of the English company at work upon the play. As each long rehearsal of the two long months devoted to its production finished and, weary and worn, we sought our homes, all of us were practically certain that once again success in New York would spell failure in London, and that there would be very few to-morrows either fair or warmer for that particular piece.

It is always supposed to be a good sign when the actors and actresses decide a play is doomed not to succeed, for almost invariably they are proved wrong. These were some of the most trying and arduous rehearsals I ever remember; they culminated in a series of dress rehearsals wherein our numerous clothes were pronounced

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"N.G." so many times by the manager, and we changed them so often, that it eventually became quite difficult to recognize each other.

We had an American producer, who had prepared the play for numberless tours in America. There he had had the advantage of being able to desire his recruits to "Give it as so-and-so does. Put that bit over like Miss K——. Miss B—— raises her right eyebrow and drops her voice on that line." Over here, not having any of these creators of the parts to cite, his task was difficult, for he had little or no creative spirit of his own. I imagine he knew what he wanted but he was certainly no help to us in our endeavours to give it to him. I remember being very much annoyed with him one day by his shouting to me from the dress-circle, "Now, Compton, put more Ginger into it." Ginger I did not object to (though, a red-haired woman is always a little sensitive to that word), but the surname—that I could not bear. In America I had never been asked to submit to it, and I was certainly not going to put up with it at home. I

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cannot remember with what quelling remark I crushed the gentleman, but crush him I did, and crushed he remained.

Ultimately the play was produced and played for one week in Manchester, very successfully ; then we had more rehearsals, more changes of clothes, and eventually we reached the London production, but even after that satisfactory opening our producer wished to go on rehearsing. Fortunately for us he was called back to America, where no doubt he is still admonishing one actor to imitate another.

So *Fair and Warmer* after its preliminary trials, entered on its long run of over a year at the Prince of Wales Theatre. I have often been asked whether it is difficult or not to go on playing the same part for a long time. Most emphatically it is !

It is a tremendous effort to keep freshness and spontaneity in a part night after night, week after week, month after month ; to concentrate on making the illusion of thinking the lines for the first time in order that neither staleness nor anything mechanical may creep into one's performance. Another

thing I found to be a hard task in *Fair and Warmer* was portraying a girl who had had too much to drink and keeping her from being objectionable to the audience. Drunkenness is more readily accepted, laughed at and condoned when indulged in by the male sex. I kept the fact well in mind that, after all, the distressing circumstance had happened to the heroine by accident, and that evidently helped me.

This was a year full of events for me—of which one or two stand out more clearly than others: my happiness in my great friendship for dear little Billie Carleton and my sorrow at her tragic death; the distress of my father's long and painful illness; my pleasure at seeing my sister Kay back from America, and my father's joy at seeing us both together again, to be followed so soon, alas, by his death; and towards the end of the run the delirious joy of Armistice Day.^{NS}

Billie Carleton and I had been friends before we played together, but had not experienced the near association that being members of the same cast can bring. She was a most lovable little creature, full of generosity,

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thought for others, sweetness, kindness. Of course she was full of fun and could not resist a joke even when frightened. We were at the Midland, Manchester, together for the first night of *Fair and Warmer*, and shared a suite. Full of excitement we sat up talking over the events of the evening, and did not settle off to sleep till about half-past one. An hour later I woke suddenly to the sounds of knocking on the bedroom door—evidently someone had managed to get into the little entrance hall of the suite and wished to penetrate further. I woke Billie gently, who had the sense to wake quietly, and murmured in hushed tones, "Someone is trying to get into this room. You 'phone while I switch on the light." Billie obeyed, and in hushed tones conveyed the news to the night porter—he was not there at all really, but Billie acted her reception of his imaginary answers so well that I was quite deceived. Before summoning courage to switch on the light, I addressed various queries to the unknown disturber of our peace. "Who are you—what are you—why are you?" to which Billie joined in with

"Who's your father?" At last I turned on the light. The door opened slowly, and a man's form could be distinguished. I leapt out of bed, threw myself and what seemed like a cascade of hot-water bottles at the door, banged it in the face of the unwelcome visitor, and turned the key. Trembling, I turned to get into bed again, and a little voice from the pillows said, "You might look in those big cupboards and under the bed, Fay, in case there are any more." But I was not "having any" from the blithe little Billie. We spent a long time trying to get hold of some authority through the medium of the 'phone, but it was no use; all was quiet, however, and we finally got to sleep. Two days later the culprit—a man with a title he proved to be—was caught creeping into our sitting-room, and was requested to leave the hotel.

Billie played the maid Tessie in *Fair and Warmer*, and made constant entrances and exits carrying trays. She was engaged to understudy me too, but she told the management she did not feel able to play my part. Consequently, it was thought best to engage

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another understudy, for both her and me. When the inevitable occasion arose that I was "off," Billie—wanting to be very kind—said to my should-have-been-trembling understudy, "Good luck ; we'll all be helping you, and I know every line of the part, so turn to me should you need a word." Said the not-in-the-least-trembling one "Oh I'm all right ; I'm not a bit nervous. It's nothing to make a fuss about, and a good deal better than having to carry trays on and off all the evening." A little later on, when Billie left us to play at the Haymarket, this polite young beginner had the pleasure of spending the evening carrying trays on and off. She is now a leading lady, and I'm sure the twin adjuncts of bigger parts and additional years have softened her manners.

There was a time when Billie and I suffered together in an effort to collect money or gifts from the audience to help one of the big war charities. Fired with zeal, full of patriotism and enthusiasm, we both made speeches—asking the audience for money to be sent round, or for gifts which we could

auction from the stage. On two terrible occasions we did this, and complete failure greeted our effort. Billie decided that something must be done. She arrived at the theatre the next evening full of excitement. "Fay, they say at the Comedy that people won't give things or send them, but they'll throw things at us if we ask them." Accordingly, we awakened and encouraged the old inclination of the members of the audience to hurl missiles at the actors. Money and jewellery came hurtling through the air and with such a goodly "bag" at our feet what cared we for a bruise or two, and a cut over the eye delivered by an exceptionally patriotic half-crown?

I do not feel this is the time or place to sadden you with details of the sorrow Billie's death was to me. I will tell you, though, how difficult it was then—and when my father died—to go on and play a roaring farce with the sincerity that farce demands. How almost impossible it was to keep out of mind at the one time the vision of Billie's laughing, loving little face, quiet in death; and at the other, the most vivid memory I

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have of my father—his gallant pretence at being well when he knew he was dying. My mother said, when she took my sister and me in to see him for the last time, “Here are both your little girls to see you, dear.” He could not speak, for it was his throat that had been affected; but he smiled, and waved his hand with the grace and courtliness of an old-time gesture, trying to indicate to us that he was better and going to get well.



CHAPTER XI

“ SAY SOMETHING AMUSING ”

An awful moment I remember at school, a moment that used to arise periodically of an evening, after prayers, when in single file we trooped past the mistresses and the headmistress to say good-night. Without any warning Miss Tullis's gaze would become contemplative, her hands would toy with the long gold chain that held her eyeglasses, twisting and untwisting it round her little finger. At this portentous sign each girl would hurry past as fast as politeness would permit; but as in Oranges and Lemons the chopper is bound to descend and chop off someone's head, so did the dread command fall upon the ears of one of us, depriving her of brain power—"Now, Fay, say something amusing."

It is always difficult to be amusing, I think, and to be so on demand more than difficult—almost impossible. Having shifted her weight from one foot to another, giggled, twisted her body and contorted her features,

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the victim used usually to confess an absolute inability to say anything amusing. "Something interesting, then," and every time I was caught I could never think of an item of the faintest interest either.

There have been moments when I have been employed upon these ramblings into the past, when the same feeling has returned to me, the same deadly ineptitude—and with it a regret that I had not more often fallen a victim to that good-night request, for practice might have made perfect and not so often would I have felt with Hamlet that indeed all my past uses in this world have been weary, flat, stale and unprofitable.

I have sought hard for cheery little anecdotes of amusing little incidents or contretemps during the run of *Cæsar's Wife*, but what I can chiefly remember, is that it was a beautiful part, that it was the biggest emotional rôle I had been entrusted with hitherto, that never before or since have I been frightened of a part, but that I *was* frightened of this part, of the brilliant cast playing with me (nearly every one of them so much more experienced than I), of the

public, and of the press. I have a vivid recollection of my relief when both press and public were kind, and my gratitude to my brother and sister artists who in their kindness to me had helped my performance so much. Never shall I forget my great affection for the part. Fear of Violet could not remain with me once I understood her, and playing her gave me a pleasure for which I shall always be grateful to Mr. Somerset Maugham. The play had a long and successful run. During it I was ill again and subject to fainting fits. I used to try and battle with them and keep off the faint to the end of an act—or better still to the end of the play—and then might be seen a solemn procession of my old friend Aubrey Smith and my new friend George Relph, carrying my unconscious form down to the subterranean dressing-rooms at the Royalty Theatre.

Sutton Vane gave a very admirable performance in *Cæsar's Wife*. I wondered if any of us suspected that he would develop into a brilliant dramatist in a few years' time. On the stage one night one of those regret-

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table incidents occurred for which naturally enough an audience finds it difficult to forgive us. It was when we had been playing for months and Eva Moore, with the usual conviction that the speech demanded, turned to us and said, "Ronnie was always a bird of Paradise"—instead of "passage"! Very likely the audience didn't notice the slip, but of course we did, and the fatal hysteria akin to that which occasionally seizes one at church or family prayers held us in its grip.

Let me see now, was it? Yes, it was during *Cæsar's Wife* that Beatrice Lillie, Mr. and Mrs. Ronald Squire and myself shared a delightful old Queen Anne house at Thames Ditton; and of the time spent there I can remember two incidents which it seems to me I dare describe as amusing.

Beattie and I were coming back in the train one day, laughing together over a copy of *The Young Visitors*; opposite us was a young man who insisted on laughing with us in our bursts of immoderate delight over the book, and was soon impelled to lean forward and address us with, "I must know

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what you young ladies are laughing at.” I was all for preserving a chilly and dignified silence, but the violent nudge Beattie gave me seemed to say “ talk to him,” so a conversation of cold and restrained politeness between the three of us ensued. The lad wished to write to me, and responding to another painful and compelling nudge from Beattie I meekly supplied both name and address. During the necessarily hasty departure one invariably makes from a railway carriage we heard excited exclamation from the youth, he having discovered my profession was that of an actress.

I reproached Beattie with those nudges. “ Ah,” said she, “ I had my reasons ; if he writes, you’ll see what we’ll do ; it was a nice child really, though offensive, and worth a little maternal care from us.”

Write he did, and asked permission to call ; this was granted, and there appeared a very smart and slightly flustered young man who became very flustered indeed when received by Ronnie Squire posing as one of my brothers, a friend of his as another, and Freddie Norton as my uncle ! They

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delivered a long lecture to him on trying to "get off" with young ladies in the train and of writing letters to them afterwards, finishing with an allusion to myself as a very nice girl, but that was my little boy with whom I could be seen playing on the lawn. Of course the poor fellow left in confusion, but believe me it was because we thought he was a very nice young creature really, that we arranged to teach him a lesson.

The other occurrence was an instance of gallantry on the part of a youth, that found favour in our eyes. We took a walk to Hampton Court accompanied by Anthony, then about seven; during what seemed a very long tramp on a very hot day, I fear we almost forgot his presence, being much engrossed with some matter of great importance in the world of the theatre. Having arrived at our destination we longed for a lemonade or cooling beverage of some kind but found we could only raise twopence halfpenny between us. It was then we heard Anthony's small voice chirping at our elbows, "Look here, you girls, I've got

plenty of money, let me treat you ”—and we did.

The next production I was in was *Summertime*, which was of rather too light a texture to weather the sea of public approval ; to me it was an instance of “ the play’s the thing,” for having made a success in *Cæsar’s Wife* I fear I had rather jumped to the conclusion that people would be sure to come and see me in my next part, but how wrong I was on that score I realized very soon.

On the last night of *Summertime* Cyril Raymond, whom I only knew as one of the shyest young men I had ever met, and who hardly dared speak to me off the stage, surprised me by playing a practical joke—for instead of handing me, in one of the scenes, a plate of sardines as he was supposed to do, he solemnly presented me with two herrings tied together with blue ribbon, and these he had the temerity to dangle in front of me before placing them on my plate.

From the Royalty I went to the Hay-market in *Tea for Three*, which was not a success ; but it was the beginning of a long

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and happy time in one of the most delightful of theatres to play in, to work in, and to spend some of one's spare time in. For me it was very significant, for years ago my grandfather, Henry Compton, had played within those very walls, trodden those very boards. His visit to the Haymarket had lasted many years, and you may be sure I hoped mine would too.

CHAPTER XII

MY BARRIE BOOK

The first page is White, and across it in bold letters I can trace the name Lucy. The page is a blank one and so was my mind when first entrusted with this part in *The Professor's Love Story*. I was stunned by the honour of being asked to play with H. B. Irving in a Barrie play. All through the run I never quite recovered from this bolt from fortune's blue. I think the part *was* a difficult one; I know *I* found it so. As I look back I believe it to be the most difficult part I ever played. I turn over the leaf to find a few faint notes on rehearsals and what I am chiefly able to decipher is a phrase with variations—"How awful I am in this part. I wish Sir James would say something, though I know he would only tell me how bad I am." "He's been in the stalls all to-day again, but not a word from him—I wish I had any hope of ever being able to play this part." "Perhaps it would be better for me to give up this part and

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spare Sir James from having to go on agreeing with me as to what a terrible performance I am going to give."

Perhaps if he ever had said anything I should have fled from the stage never to return; perhaps he felt this too, and in kindness refrained from comment of any kind. On the opposite page I discern friendly faces in the company and can hear them laugh when I stamp my foot in the cornfield with rather unnecessary vigour, and the theatre resounds with the hollow sound of a foot stamping on a wooden board. Again I can feel both H. B. and Henrietta Watson encouraging me, and somehow I wade through the trials of rehearsal, the horror of a first night, and that over, find myself allowed to stay in the bill. But don't imagine I peruse any good account of myself as "Lucy" in my book of Barrie memories, because I don't, only pages full of dots—to represent my unspeakable opinion of myself in the part. I close my eyes and a faint shrill sound of music comes to my ears—Pouff! Peter is playing his pan-pipes and has blown several pages over

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at once to save me the trouble of turning them. "Hullo! Fay, do you remember when you were me?" he says. Do I remember? I should think I did! The pages are written and re-written with happy memories of learning to speak Peter's words, think Peter's thoughts, sing Peter's songs, fly with Peter's wings, fight Peter's battles, be friends with his friends and take care of Wendy as he did. It's a picture book now—the family portraits are there. Martin Lewis as Mr. Darling, Stella Patrick Campbell as his wife, Isobel Elsom as Wendy, Vesta Sylva as Michael, Anton Dolin, then called Pat Kay, as "John," Betty Faire as one of the lost boys. Nanny—the real Nanny had to go to the war, but his wife felt it to be a family matter and played the part for him that year! What is this funny little drawing in the corner—an angel? an aeroplane? it's me learning to fly and being left suspended with my legs on the level that my head should be. I can quite understand your laughing, but you wouldn't laugh so much if you knew that something had gone wrong with the wires, and that I am

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going to stay like that for half an hour. Another little sketch I can show you there in the middle of this next page—Peter fighting with Captain Hook—yes, it's Hook that looks a little frightened ; but this is only a rehearsal, and Holman Clark had been used to smaller, daintier Peters than I, and he had to get used to the fury of my attack, and the gibes of Starkie—poor “ miserable Starkie ”—played by Hugh E. Wright, a very old friend of mine.

Here is something that delighted and encouraged me so much in the thought that I was to play Peter—a letter from Sir James saying :

“ I hope you will be able to play Peter. It will be a joy to me to hear from Mr. Boucicault that it is to come off.”

Here is a little memorandum of when I was dressing for the first night of Peter, and I remembered how years and years before I had gone to play with a little boy bearing a Scotch name. I had talked on the steps with his father and he had introduced me to a gentleman with whom I had a long and cheery conversation. Afterwards the little

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boy's father told me that the gentleman I had been talking to was Mr. Barrie, and that at Christmas-time he would take me to see a lovely play that Mr. Barrie had written about a boy who wouldn't grow up. It all happened just as he had said, and I told him how I would love to be Peter one day—and he thought maybe I would—and even that was to come true now! When I played Peter it was the fifteenth year that he had refused to grow a day older, and I find a little note I have missed in the rehearsal pages, of when the original Peter came down to the Duke of York's. It made me realize how many Christmas times Peter had been appearing when she said, "Oh, there you are, all at the dear old Peter work again." I daresay that is the only time Peter has been called old. I've forgotten to read you a reference to Dion Boucicault and his wonderful powers as a producer. I think he loved every word and note of Peter Pan, certainly he used to be in the prompt corner singing the songs with us at rehearsals and at night too.

Oh, this is a very funny page, full of all

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the letters and messages from tiny children which fell to my lot and which every Peter Pan gets. I used to think what fun it would be if one could invite them all to the tea-parties we had after the matinées when the children in the play and our children, and we ourselves all had tea and games together. But perhaps if the children who wrote the letters had been able to come they would have been disappointed to find the Peter, of whose small boyhood they apparently had no doubt, with a small boy of his own.

When Anthony came to see me play Peter, he was only five, and when Peter was left alone in the lagoon scene saying, "To die would be an awfully big adventure" a loud wail rose from the box, and poor Ant had to be carried out crying, "They've left her alone—left her all alone!" I had evidently not succeeded in impressing him with the masculinity of my impersonation of a member of his own sex.

I only played Peter one year. I was terribly disappointed when I learnt that business arrangements would not adjust themselves

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to let me do so the following year. Sir James told me not to mind, he was going to write "something I would like better." I thought he was just saying that to comfort me, but look at these pages all clasped together with a big M.R. outside; we must not look at them now for a little voice from the apple tree has asked me whether *Mary Rose* may not have a chapter all to herself; not because she is the only Barrie heroine I created, but because Mary Rose doesn't want her ghostly self to frighten the other heroines. I am so fond of her—of course she must have a chapter to herself if she wants to, whatever her reason may be.

We will look at all the pictures of Phœbe in *Quality Street*, for the illustrations are more profuse than the notes I find. My pictures of Phœbe when she looked like a little Kate Greenaway girl, happy Phœbe of the ringlets, sad Phœbe in her little cap. Daring Phœbe under the umbrella, poor shattered little Phœbe when Valentine Brown goes away. Tired Phœbe with "the headache" and the unruly boys to manage, dear Susan on one side of her and dear Patty on the

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other. Phœbe as the mischievous, intriguing, flirtatious, deceptive Miss Livvy, and the happiest Phœbe of all, safe in the crook of her beloved Valentine's one arm.

I suggested all the colourings and materials for Leo's costumes, which were accepted and approved by the author, and beautifully carried out by Messrs. Simmons. Wonderful rehearsals they were, all taken by Barrie himself—that prince among stage managers, Charles la Trobe, as his right hand Grand Vizier. Mary Jerrold as Susan, whom I had known the joy of playing with in *Mary Rose* and whom I look upon as one of the most delightful actresses we have to-day. Leo who wanted to marry me as Valentine, and as Leo too. Hilda Trevelyan, who was a perfect darling as Patty, and is a perfect darling as herself. Only one distressing incident I find recorded, and that was when Barrie said to me in the middle of a scene, "I don't know what's the matter with that speech, but it's all wrong from beginning to end ; someone will have to do something about it " and I burst into tears.



Photo by]

FAY COMPTON AS "OPHELIA"

[Sasha Ltd

MY BARRIE BOOK

It was the most exciting first night—a wonderful house and a wonderful enthusiasm. I wore the brooch Mary Jerrold gave me for the first night of *Mary Rose*, for luck; I felt awful when I heard that the original Phœbe—Ellaline Terriss—was in a box, and overjoyed when at the end she waved and kissed her hand to me. As it was a second revival of the piece no one was expecting a long run, and to our surprise it lasted almost a year.

I have two mementoes of *Quality Street*, the horse I used to ride in London, who is of a vivid brown and now lives in the country, named Valentine—and he certainly answers to the description “always so dashing” — and my dear, quiet little pony, also living in the country, named Phœbe.

During the run of *Quality Street* and on St. Valentine's Day Leo and I were married. We eluded the eye of the too curious by effecting an entrance to the Registrar's in the High Street, Slough, by the back way. This was accomplished—after a kindly letter from the Registrar himself, assuring us that

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his office had been haunted by pressmen and photographers for three days—by our speaking nicely to the barber who lived next door. He lent us a ladder and allowed us to climb over his garden wall. We made the same graceful exit after the ceremony and strolled unrecognized down the High Street, while the best man and the bride's attendant very obligingly braved the besieging mob of reporters and camera men for us. Now I hear a sound as of the pattering of bare feet. Lady Babbie wishes to dance across the pages of my memory. Oh, Babbie! what trouble it was to me that you had to speak Scots part of the time. I don't think I'm very good at dialects, and I'm sure it would have been a hopeless matter but for the patient teaching I had from a Scots friend, Lola Duncan. I can find very little written in my book about Babbie—for one thing it was such a short time ago—and for another, I had a poor opinion of myself in the part. Sir James was pleased with me though, so out of loyalty to him I won't decry myself. I fear I have not been able to tell you anything really of Barrie himself, but

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even if you knew him as much—which is as little—as I do, you would realize that the Barrie charm, the Barrie touch, the Barrie spirit, is just as evident in the man as in his writing—and just as elusive.

CHAPTER XIII

"MARY ROSE"

There is no denying that from the very beginning there was something "different" about the production of *Mary Rose*.

Even before she talked to me from the typed pages of a manuscript I was wondering about her, wondering if it could really be true that Barrie was going to write a story especially for me, wherein I should find a heroine with whose creation on the stage he could entrust me. And then the manuscript arrived. Think of the joy and wonder of reading *Mary Rose* for the first time and realizing that the chance of interpreting that fragrant, delicate, intangible, appealing creature was yours if you dared to take it.

I hardly dared, but I could not resist *Mary Rose*.

During the rehearsals we all felt the spell of her ; she weaved an enchantment of forgetfulness, brushing away from our minds the world of to-day, taking us back to the

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seventies, to her orchard and her pretty home, not allowing us to remember the streets and traffic of the nineteen twenties or the reality of a stage, an auditorium and an audience.

She sang to Norman O'Neill and inspired him to write that beautiful, haunting music which in turn inspired us ; the tremendous debt of gratitude I owed to that music I can never hope to repay.

Surely it must have been Mary Rose herself who turned Charles la Trobe into a wizard, whose lighting effects created an atmosphere of ghostliness no amount of intricate mechanical contrivances could hope to better.

And to me Mary Rose would send a wireless flash of understanding from time to time, illuminating the meaning of a thought not understood before ; she would paint me a picture of the place where the voices were calling to her, and the picture was so vivid that I could hear the voices too ; her gentle little laugh would sound in my ears as she bent down to speak to “ the little old woman,” and as it sounded “ the little old woman ”

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was there for me to see too. I felt her tears when she came back—and all was strange, and it hurt to try to understand how this could be so ; and I heard her sighs when she was a poor little ghost coming back—not finding what she wanted and coming back again and again.

Many people asked me—and many people wrote to me the same question—“ What is the meaning of *Mary Rose* ? ”

Mary Rose had a meaning for everyone, of course, but possibly not the same meaning, therefore to answer that question is as impossible now as it was then. Some people saw the play, and for them it meant nothing—but that was their misfortune—not Sir James Barrie's fault. What the part and the play meant to me I tried to make clear when I was playing it—but I couldn't write it down now, and I don't think I could have at the time. When studying most parts, I think about them, then put them at the back of my brain, and let my subconscious brain continue the work undisturbed. Out they come again a little more developed, a little better understood, a little nearer to

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what their author meant them to be. This I did to a haunting degree with Mary Rose, and found her more difficult to rehearse than many parts because much of her was so real to me that I did not want to practise it ; I felt that in her case, over repetition, especially of the time when she goes away—and her return both in the flesh and as a ghost—might harm the sense of the elusive and the intangible, which was bound to be the keynote of one's conception of the part.

You will remember that Mary Jerrold played my mother ; that was the beginning of a long and delightful association and friendship between us. I remember we were all very interested and quite a bit anxious about the clothes for Mary Rose and her mother. Molly and I spent hours together looking through *Punch* and other magazines and fashion books of the time, and from them all we evolved the dresses worn by us in the play. I was not a little awed, and certainly greatly helped by the other members of the cast. I know there were more than one or two performances

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I shall never see bettered—and alas, one that we shall never see again.*

Naturally, in a long run, various amusing little contretemps occurred. There was an evening when I wondered what could be the matter with Molly, she looked strained and anxious. I was in the wings and I saw her trying to send a message of warning to me, the while she continued her charming performance, but I was not able to receive it. As soon as I was on the stage and sat beside her on the sofa I realized the cause of her distress—you know how tiny she is—for this reason a high special cushion was hers to place her on a better level when we sat together; on this night a mistake had been made, and I found myself perched on the elevated position intended for her—feeling like Alice in Wonderland suddenly grown tall, gazing down upon a Molly who was quivering with a mighty determination not to laugh.

Another evening Ernest Thesiger went to the boat to fetch our picnic hamper, and a spasm of positive agony passed across his

* The late Arthur Whitby.



Photo by]

FAY COMPTON AS "OPHELIA"

“MARY ROSE”

features ; this was succeeded by the imperturbable expression of the “gillie,” but when we opened the basket we understood—for the basket was bare, no picnic was there—and we had to try to convey by an elaborate pretence that it was *not* a case of “so the poor dog had none,” and that we were enjoying a hearty meal.

Then there was the most agonizing moment of all when Norman Forbes was describing the island to Simon in the first act, and in a momentary fit of abstraction instead of saying “there was nothing living on the island—no trees,” observed dreamily—but with conviction—“There was nothing living on the island—no fish !” He did not realize what he had said, and it was the difficult task of Leo and Molly to pretend to him—to themselves—to the audience—that they had not heard him.

There are many reasons why *Mary Rose* and all its memories will always be dear to me—and one in particular—for it was while playing in *Mary Rose* that my husband, Leon Quartermaine, was engaged to succeed Robert Loraine as my sailor husband in the

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play. At rehearsals I thought " Mr. Quartermaine " a particularly charming man and a delightful actor. On the occasion of his first appearance as Simon I came on to the stage—I saw him in his naval uniform—and I was conquered.

CHAPTER XIV

A JOURNEY TO NOTTINGHAM

I do not know enough of the practice of other arts to make a definite statement, but it would intrigue me to know, should I ever have the time to find out, whether musicians, painters, sculptors, writers, enjoy quite so many "switchback" experiences as do members of my own profession. I don't mean only as regards the ups and downs of being in and out of work. I think all members of the arts share these privileges, but in wide differences of the work done. Take the instance of the production of *The Circle* which was sandwiched between those of *Mary Rose* and *Quality Street*. *The Circle* was a brilliant play, but of course utterly unlike its predecessor, in that it was essentially modern and cynical. Its first night was certainly like a plunge into a cold bath after the comfort of a hot one. It was decidedly dashing, after memories of *Mary Rose's* first appearance to a most friendly house, to hear all Mr. Maugham's witty and amusing

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dialogue being spoken to a dull and apathetic audience who would only vouchsafe it a few sickly smiles.

A first-night house is always an unknown quantity, prone to give one a surprise of some kind, and this one treated us to the unpleasant variety of a "booing" gallery. Not since one sad night with the Follies had I heard what will always seem to me an unsporting demonstration of disapproval. But, as in many another instance, several "boos" do not make a failure. *The Circle* was altogether too brilliant a piece of work to succumb to an ungenerous first-night house. We had the satisfaction of hearing many a large audience, laughing and enjoying themselves during its run of nearly six months. It was a change for Leo and for me to find ourselves playing two quite "straight" modern young people after the varying ages and conditions of Mary Rose and Simon, and as our parts in *The Circle* were subservient to those played—and so magnificently played too—by Allan Aynesworth, Lottie Venne and Holman Clarke, I don't mind confessing that we found

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the altered condition restful but a little dull.

On the first night of *The Circle* I had a telegram from Gerald du Maurier, who had evidently seen *Mary Rose*, saying :

“ Don’t disappear in this play. I couldn’t bear it ! ”

About this time I was very anxious to introduce Leo to my mother, who was at this time with Viola and Kay engaged upon the engrossing and more hard-working task of running a repertory theatre. My brother-in-law, Henry Crocker, was once heard to observe, when by some odd chance he and some other members of the company had time to take a short walk in one of Nottingham’s many parks, “ Prisoners of the repertory theatre out for half-an-hour’s exercise,” and it is undoubtedly true of repertory work that those connected with it must practically live in the theatre. However, I had heard it rumoured that occasional Sundays were free, and being careful to make sure beforehand that I was choosing one of these, Leo and I started off from town for a pleasant little trip to Nottinghamshire’s county town.

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And very pleasant it was till in Rutland, as we were going down a hill, on the *right* side of the road, I repeat the *right* side of the road, another car appeared round a corner and had the impertinence to mount the hill on the *wrong* side of the road ; may I impress upon you to remember that of the second car I have said the wrong side of the road. The meeting of the two cars did not take as long to happen as it has taken to write these few lines describing it. Both cars were going at a good speed—they met head on. The force of the impact shot both Leo and myself out of the back of the car into the road, and as we slowly came to and found ourselves lying there wondering what had hit us, I recovered sufficient consciousness to feel that portion of me enclosed in a motoring helmet, and to enquire of Leo : “ Is my face all right ? ” “ Yes,” he answered. “ Well, then, pull my skirt down.” This accomplished, I felt at liberty to faint again, and did so.

It was a most distressing accident from many points of view. It was not our fault ; it was expensive ; it was a waste of time ;

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and it involved a most irritating visit to a country practitioner. This worthy spent a very long time giving us a very long-winded description of a hunting accident that had occurred in the neighbourhood the day before. When I was quite unable to bear a word more I suggested that a little more attention to our accident and our injuries, and a little less discourse on the hunting one, would be advisable. He was rather offended with me and with a bad grace he consented to anoint my bruises and deal with the various injuries Leo had sustained, including one to a finger, the use of which he has never really recovered since. Now, should you be able to find a record of this accident, it would surprise you to find that we lost our case; that is to say, if you have been kind enough to take my word for the facts of it. Unfortunately for us there were those who did not do so.

We managed to get to Nottingham late in the evening and heralded our approach with remarks such as, "Now don't be alarmed, there's been a slight accident. Sorry we're late, but another car and a tiresome doctor delayed us. We don't look up

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to much, but we're not seriously hurt"—and then made a dramatic entrance, bruised and bandaged, Leo with his arm in a sling.

As I have already told you, it was during the run of *Quality Street*, in which production we found ourselves in the early nineteenth century playing two delightful characters, that Leo and I were married. Between the productions of *Quality Street* and *Secrets* we had the first holiday I had been able to have for years and years. When you only have a holiday very occasionally, how you enjoy it! Some friends of a friend had a beautiful house high up on the cliffs above the loveliest cove in England—its first name is Lulworth. This house was never let as a rule, but the owners were kind enough to allow us to be tenants of it for some weeks. It was a charming house and had a beautiful built-in terrace up to a fascinating summer-house. From there you look straight down the cliff to rocks and sea. We had a lovely holiday, lazing, bathing, walking; and I remember an interesting visit to the "Tess" country, and a lovely drive through Hardy's Wessex.



Photo by

FAY COMPTON AS "OPHELIA"
JOHN BARRYMORE AS "HAMLET"

[Sasha Ltd.]

CHAPTER XV

FINDING A FARM

When thinking of *Secrets* I have the satisfaction of saying to myself, "Well, I worked as hard in that part as I can ever be called upon to do, whatever heavy parts are stored away for me in the future."

It was a beautiful part and I enjoyed every moment of it, but it permitted of not one leisurely instant from the rise to the fall of the curtain. I was on the stage nearly all the time, or else engrossed in frantically quick changes from a very old woman to a fresh young girl, from a young girl to a not quite so young wife, from a young wife to a middle-aged mother, and from her to the old lady again. Changes of wigs and make-up for each one and only just time to accomplish these whether during a three-minute interval or a short act wait. By all who knew us both, the tremendous likeness to my mother when I was playing the old lady, was frequently commented on. I had encouraged this by copying mother's hair-

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dressing and she had done so too by lending me a dress and scarf of hers. They say there is nothing more fortunate than having something to wear in a new part that has been worn before—the truth of this was amply proved for me in *Secrets*, for the play was a big success. Clothes are a very important factor on the stage, and whether I am playing what is termed a straight part or a character one, I give the utmost care and thought to every detail of dress and make-up. Especially in characterizing someone older or utterly unlike oneself the clothes are a tremendous help—once you see yourself dressed, many an idea about the part will come to you that has not done so before.

I loved playing all the different ages of Mary, and though tiring, it was a most interesting and absorbing evening's work. Each age seemed my favourite till the next came along, until at last I decided that I mustn't have a preference for fear of hurting the feelings of the others. I appreciated greatly a letter from Landon Ronald about Mary; in it he said:

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“Last night I was in a box and saw *Secrets* for the first time. Your performance quite swept me off my feet and I must send you my heartfelt thanks for a true artistic joy.”

It was while I was playing in *Secrets* that I was “filming” Mary Stuart; she went in for many and varied changes of costume and head-dresses too. I remember speaking to one of the extra ladies and congratulating her on her dress and make-up. She fixed me with a penetrating gaze, saying, “I am always very careful what I wear in a historical film; I spend weeks and sometimes months beforehand in careful research work.” I don’t know whether she thought I didn’t, or why she launched this attack at me. Anyway it was a very hot day and I thought it would be best for the sake of the film for neither of us to become more heated, so I did not enter into a description of my study of all the pictures that could be found with ease or difficulty of the unfortunate Mary Stuart, but mounted my charger and rode away. They say work promotes work—or words to that effect—and the combined

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effect of filming by day and playing a heavy part at night did not prevent my adding another labour to my daily tasks.

It had become imperative—chiefly because of the number of dogs of all kinds that we had acquired—to find a house in the country that would be attractive to them all the year round, and at which Leo and I might visit them on every available week-end, where also we might spend our holidays with them, (if we ever got any), and at any rate where Anthony might do so. I said labour advisedly—and though it was a labour of love, yet labour it undeniably was. It is one thing to decide to find a charming old house in the country within reasonable distance of London, and quite another thing to do so. The house had to be genuinely old too—one of my stipulations ; and the living rooms must face south—one of Leo's ; and it must have a large garden and grounds of its own—one of Anthony's ; lovely surroundings, country and beautiful woods to roam in, were two of the demands made by the dogs.

Sunday after Sunday we left London and,

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armed with volumes of orders to view, explored the home counties. It is a pity that when one peruses those little descriptive slips from the agents, one always sees what one's optimistic self has imagined—never realizing that it is ten chances to one the scrap of paper is a permission to look over a house and grounds the like of which has never been conjured up even in one's most depressed moments. With the light of hope on our faces, each day of rest saw us embarking in the car, each Sabbath saw our return in dark despair. Then came a Sunday when Leo could not accompany me ; he provided me with a carefully drawn route to the exact spot in Surrey where I should find the buried treasure—I mean the golden house of our dreams—also he presented me with several minutely marked maps ; added to this, he explained the exact position, latitude and longitude of the spot we were in search of, to the chauffeur. I did not feel it was possible for us to make a mistake, and was careful not to follow the route too assiduously, or to commit the folly of looking at the maps at all, my chauffeur was not any

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better at following instructions as to a route than anyone else's of my acquaintance⁸; accordingly on this sunny Sunday to Surrey's lanes and Surrey's hills I went. Farther than "the road that runs by Merrow Down" and "above the river Wey" and not so very far from "where Bramley stands"—there I found *it*—an old farmhouse. The sun was pouring on its front windows; assuredly this attractive house faced south. Well did I know the lovely country surrounding it, and I realized the property was but thirty-five miles from London. In a state of excitement bordering on lunacy I went over the house, and found it alluring. I suspected hidden beams and old fireplaces. I made a secret mental note to instal two bathrooms and a pantry.

Ecstatic, I returned to town, to wait for the next Sunday was impossible. I got a day off from filming, full of pride I sat in the car by Leo's side awaiting his look of joy on beholding the "farm." When we were about five miles away, Leo scanned the route very intently. I told him there was no need for this careful scrutiny; the

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spot once found we could find it again. "You're going wrong, you've taken the wrong road." "Oh, no." "Oh, yes ; if you found the house of which we found the advertisement, and to which I carefully mapped out a route for you, you certainly should have borne to the left here."

I was dumb with distress, if I had found the wrong house—which certainly was the right house for us—maybe we should find the right house as unattractive as others we had seen. Leo was dumb with surprise that even a woman and a chauffeur could have failed to follow his instructions. The chauffeur was dumb with determination to find the house he had found before, and not to have the trouble of ferreting out another one. He received no order to change the order of his going, and so he went as hard as the car would allow him, and there was the farm once more glinting yellow in the sunshine—but Leo was right—it was *not* the house of the advertisement ! Nearly in tears and sure that the right house could not be as perfect as the wrong one I sat miserably in the car, while

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under Leo's directions we were driven to the house we had seen advertised, and incredible as it seems it *was* as perfect, only more so, for in addition to its own mellow beauty (it dates from Tudor times), we saw that it possessed a collection of lovely old barns and farm-buildings, that it faced south, had land round it for a garden and much else besides, and was close to some beautiful woods. And so, after all our adventures, and in spite of my mistake, the house of our imaginings was found and acquired.



CHAPTER XVI

OPHELIA

My mirrors of memory seem now to become more than usually kaleidoscopic ; they reflect the old-fashioned maiden of *Secrets*, a swift transformation and I see the modern Princess Flavia of the *Prisoner of Zenda*. In the one I am scarcely ever off the stage, and in the other I am scarcely ever on ! The next change is to the black-haired almond-eyed Yasmin of the East in *Hassan*, and with her are glimpsed alternate flashes of the essentially Western characters, she of the film *The Eleventh Commandment*, and she of the play *The Claimant*—these three are young. I look again and there is the middle-aged mother of the film *The Happy Ending*. A flash and she has changed to the young French girl of the play *Orange Blossoms*. Another vision and I see Hamlet's Ophelia.

It is no uncommon thing for an actress or a film actress to read of herself that, artistic as she may be in her own line of parts, yet

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what a pity it is that line is not more varied ; how refreshing it would be if Miss So-and-so could be persuaded to renounce her own type for once and give us a glimpse of her in something different. I remember reading, " If Mary Pickford could only be persuaded to appear upon the screen without her ringlets, how thankful we should all be." Yet when that fascinating and brilliantly clever little actress gave her moving portrayal of the orphan in *Stella Maris*—in which her amazingly clever make-up rendered her quite plain and almost unrecognizable, and again when, as the Japanese maiden in *Madame Butterfly*, her representation was as full of pathos as it was true to type, and where her black hair and Eastern make-up showed once more her willingness to sacrifice the fair ringlets—did she receive the commendation and the appreciation that was her due ? I don't think so.

When Mr. Dean asked me if I would play the Persian Yasmin, how delighted I was to be able to accept the offer. I thought that here would be my chance to show my willingness to appear without my red hair

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and to depict, instead of, as had been my wont latterly, a character of sweetness and charm, a creature very much the reverse, —sensual, cruel, repellent. I took great pains with my make-up, copying an illustration by Dulac. My sleek long black wig reminded me of a time long ago in the Follies, when I had impersonated Lily Brayton in our burlesque of *Kismet*, and one of my sisters heard a member of the audience say, “ Ah, that’s her real hair ; she’s dark really ; that beautiful red hair is only a wig she wears ! ”

For Yasmin, with infinite care I converted my own fair skin to an olive colour, gave myself slanting eyebrows, almond shaped eyes, and a cruel mouth. Was this transformation of face and personality and the hiding of red hair beneath a black wig received with even a stinted acknowledgment that I had done my artistic best to travel from West to East ? No. It was greeted with what might be termed a storm of disapproval from press and public ; friends and foes alike bewailed the raven hair, though why they should have expected

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a red-haired Persian, I know not. But I am not discouraged, and when I have a chance to play a different type of part again I shall attack it with the same zeal, but next time I shall know I have to expect a volley of condemnation.

I hope that if ever I go to the East in a play again I may once more have the help of having Leo there to give another performance as perfect as the one he gave of *Ishak*.

Before the run of *Secrets* had ended we had secured our farm, and each Sunday we made trips to it—picnicking in the empty rooms, and spending hours scraping the beams suspected by us each Sunday and discovered by the builders during the week. There were two wonderful Sundays when on one occasion we found that in the big bedroom the magnificent “King beam” sought and longed for by many and found by few had appeared; and on another the sight of a beautiful open fireplace with seats each side greeted our expectant exploration of the library. Not only did we scrape beams and old doors, but helped to

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stain them and to stain all the doors. Now that we have finished with the house we labour in the garden, and of all we have accomplished and hope to still complete there, I have not space to tell you. The present pack of hounds that keep the house warm for us during the week consists of two Alsatian wolfhounds, two chows, one bobtailed sheepdog, one spaniel, one aire-dale pup. The entire responsibility of keeping the London home fires burning rests at present with one very small but very "pedigree" pug, name of Hamlet. I tell him Hamlet should have been a Dane, but he tells me he is not to blame either for being a pug or being christened Hamlet.

Talking of Hamlet reminds me that during rehearsals of *The Prisoner of Zenda*, I was given a week-end off to go to Paris and order my clothes for Flavia, and a busy and momentous week-end it was. I did not fly; I went in the more ordinary way by boat and train with Beryl Norman, who was then my secretary and who, by the way, was with me in the Mary Stuart film, and there met Ivan Samson to whom she is now

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married. We spent a busy time choosing dresses at the salons of Captain Edward Molyneux, who has long been a friend of mine. He suggested a trip to Deauville on the Sunday, and a visit to the Casino ; only once before had I found myself at the tables and that was with Lady Dudley at Le Touquet, when I won sixty pounds and then stopped—on this occasion I lost about nine and again I stopped. We started very early, Edward Molyneux and Elsa Maxwell, Beryl and I. It was summer, the weather was lovely, and we had a delightful picnic-lunch en route. When at Deauville, Elsa suggested we should go on a little further and call on Jack and Blanche Barrymore, who had taken a little villa above Trouville ; accordingly off we sped and were lucky enough to find them at home.

It was over a refreshing cup of tea in the garden that Jack told us of his production of *Hamlet* in New York, and of how he wanted to do it in London. I said, half in joke—you know the way you do that : pretend that you are saying a thing in jest though you are really wholly serious, in

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order that you may laugh as at a joke, should your remark be received as such. It was in this way that I said to Jack, "If ever you play Hamlet in London, I hope you will have me for your Ophelia," and Jack said to me, apparently perfectly in earnest, "I hope I may be able to get you." Happy augury, happy fulfilment. But I didn't dare let myself dwell on the possibility that I really might play Ophelia; it seemed too vague and far too happy a dream to ever become a reality; still I know the thought of it was always at the back of my brain from that day at Trouville to the moment it was all definitely settled some months later. It may seem strange but I was at once very happy and yet fearful of the thought of playing Ophelia. However, if you consider one or two points of which I was thinking, you will see why this was so. The happy part of it is easily explained; naturally I wanted to play in Shakespeare, and to play Ophelia in John Barrymore's beautiful production of *Hamlet*, with himself as the Dane, and an exceptional cast of English players in the other principal parts,

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made the prospect a very alluring one. But—and it was a big but—how should I be received in Shakespeare, and in a part so entirely different to anything I had so far attempted? There was “the rub” indeed—much happiness it would bring me in the end if my appearance as Ophelia was to be greeted by a storm of protest! The cause of my anxiety on this score lay in the fact that I had never “done,” as they say, any Shakespeare before, and it is a sad fact, as I have already pointed out, that nine times out of ten when an actor or actress breaks away from the particular type of work with which they have always been associated, it is almost invariably their fate to be severely censured, even if they are successful in their new venture; it is the daring to do something different that seems to be the crime. So I, about to take a step into the unknown, looked about me for a staff to lean on; I found it in the thought that my father had been a very fine exponent of Shakespearean parts before he devoted his energies solely to Old English Comedy, and my grandfather, Henry Compton, was one

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of the best-known Shakespearean actors of his day, for years associated with the Haymarket Theatre ; and my mother, had she not played Shakespeare ? Of course she had ; so, I thought, perhaps I would be forgiven after all, for venturing on a trail already blazed for me by a father, a mother, and a grandfather.* Nevertheless I was very relieved as well as extremely happy, to know after the production of *Hamlet* that I had made a success as Ophelia.

It was one Sunday afternoon at our farm in the country, several months after the tea-party at Trouville, that I had a telephone conversation with Constance Collier, who told me it had been finally arranged that Barrymore was to produce and play *Hamlet* in London, and that on her advice as well as by his own inclination he wanted me to play Ophelia. Constance herself not only played the part of the Queen in *Hamlet* very successfully, but she proved a most valuable adviser to Jack in the casting of the principal

* I did not know until I read my brother's introduction that I might have seen in the National Gallery what my grandmother looked like as Ophelia.

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parts in London, as everyone will agree, when they remember the fine performances given by Malcolm Keen as the King, George Relph as Horatio, Herbert Wareing as Polonius, Courtenay Thorpe as the Ghost.

It can be imagined how delighted I was to hear the news Constance gave me, and how anxious we both were when a little later it seemed that, though the cast was arranged, the scenery and costumes on their way from New York, every preliminary to rehearsals looked to, in spite of all this and the high desire of everyone concerned, Jack was not going to be able to get a Theatre in which to produce the play ! We all lived through a very trying period when negotiations for practically every Theatre in London were entered into, only to be abandoned for some reason or another. Finally I suggested that Jack should try and arrange for the Haymarket, not really thinking that anything so propitious could possibly occur ; nevertheless, Mr. William Foss, Jack's Manager for the London season, and he, were able most fortunately to arrange that *Hamlet* should be produced at the Hay-

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market—a fine setting for a fine venture. Time, however, had not been wasted, for meanwhile Jack had rehearsed with me and several other members of the cast separately, so that when actual rehearsals started we were most of us very well advanced in the work to be done. And here I should like to pay the very highest tribute to Barrymore's gifts as a producer. He has, something that sounds so obvious and yet is found so rarely, the power to illuminate others not only with his ideas, but with his inspiration and imagination, giving these to you in a way that enables you to translate them, through your own personality, to live his meaning. I shall never forget either, his patience and unflagging energy; day after day he rehearsed the Ophelia scenes with me, always fired with an enthusiasm that in itself was an inspiration to anyone working with him, full of ideas, full of encouragement, and unsparing in his efforts to help me perfect, as far as I was capable, my attempt to mirror Ophelia's sad story. The success which later I was so happy in knowing attended this attempt,

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I owe in a great measure to Barrymore's inspiration and guidance, and for these, so generously given, I shall always be intensely grateful.

At the rehearsals proper at the Haymarket, my chief memories seem to be of the very large meals Constance and I used to consume in her dressing-room every day. These would be taken during our waits or after rehearsal was over, and I look back in amazement to see myself sitting down to a steak, polishing off one or two large chops, or thoroughly enjoying that dish beloved of old-time mummers, steak and kidney pudding. Mummers!—that must have been the explanation. That is what atmosphere can do for one. We were rehearsing Shakespeare at one of the former homes of Shakespeare and we immediately became imbued with the habits, to say nothing of the appetites, of real old mummers—at any rate I have never eaten such meals during rehearsals, or at any other time, before or since. Another memory I have is of Jack Barrymore, who is always great fun, however serious he may be about a production,

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telling several of us how pleased he was with our various efforts at acting just at the moment when Peter, the big tabby Haymarket cat, happened to walk across the stage for the sixth or seventh time that day in the aloof and reflective way that cats have ; “ Fay,” said Jack, full of enthusiasm, “ you’re going to be simply wonderful, and, Malcolm, you’re immense in the part—Constance, you’ll be marvellous—and as for *you*, Peter,” to the cat, who was walking by him at that moment, “ *you’re* going to make a hell of a hit in one of my soliloquies ! ”

Of course there were several arguments as to the correct way to stress the syllables of certain words in the verse. Herbert Wareing and I had a long war over a line of mine—

“ And with a look so piteous in purport.”

Now I said, and said very firmly, that the word “ purport ” should be spoken with the accent on the last syllable if the rhythm was to be correct—“ *purport* ” ; Mr. Wareing, however, said, just as firmly, that my idea was all nonsense and that the only way for the rhythm to be correct was to stress the first syllable, “ *purport.* ” Neither of us

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would give in, and for several days we argued over it, getting quite angry with each other, until at last Mr. Wareing came up to me at the end of a morning's rehearsal and said, "By the way, Fay, why don't you try a glass of *pur-port* with your lunch!" That finished the argument, but nevertheless I stuck to my opinion!*

The last night of *Hamlet* was the occasion of a huge supper-party after the play was over, given by Jack to the company and the entire staff of the Theatre, including the stage-hands and the cleaners. It was given on the stage, the tables were put on the top of the steps which were such a feature of the *Hamlet* scenery, and we all sat on the steps to eat and drink our fill. It was a great party, and as you can imagine Barrymore's popularity with the staff, already very great, was at least doubled by this entirely happy idea.

As my memories of *Hamlet* fade, I am reminded of an "apparition" indeed, a faded, jaded, ghastly and worn-out looking thing—Courtenay Thorpe, in his make-up

* My brother says that I was wrong.

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for the Ghost—who turned to me one evening looking, naturally, as if he had come back from the grave and said very miserably, “Fay, dear, do *you* find that there is something about this play that makes one utterly miserable? I myself feel a most unhappy creature.” He certainly looked so! As a matter of fact, he was perfectly right; it is true of the playing of *Hamlet*, as I suppose it is true of the playing of any great tragedy, that there settles over everyone acting in the play an atmosphere of impending doom, a gradual closing in of every way of escape from disaster and a very real gloom; this, we found, not only had a most exhausting effect on us all while we were actually in the Theatre playing, but was most difficult to shake off when we were trying to recover our ordinary good spirits in our homes. Nevertheless, however depressing an atmosphere *Hamlet* may have produced upon me, how glad I am to have played Ophelia, how I loved the interest and stimulus of what was to me a new experience, and how I hope that I shall one day play another Shakespeare heroine.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW ? WHEN ? WHERE ?

So constantly am I asked how I like acting for the films that I feel anxious to avail myself of this excellent opportunity to answer that question, and also to furnish gratuitous information as to when and where I like it—and why—and many other queries on the same subject.

How do I—well, I like it best in the studio, which seems a strange preference—for a day's work there is on the whole very much harder and more tiring than a day's work on locations. The film artist's day begins early, as you know, and much more "shooting" can be got through during one day spent under the hot and heavy arc lights and the glass roof of the studio than Nature's beautiful but variable rays of sunshine and a sometimes blue sky will permit of out of doors. Consequently a day "on the floor," with quick changes of sets, permitting the camera man to wind that little handle and release countless feet of film, means to the artist a day of inten-

sive concentration and practically continuous nervous strain. And yet, I like the studio work best! Why? Because the lights—the sets—the atmosphere generally is more theatrical; because it reminds me more of my surroundings on the stage; because though that important factor, the audience, is absent, I am more aware of a sense of the theatre in the studio than out of doors.

When do I like it? Financially, when my income tax is due. Artistically, when I am at work upon a costume film, an inherited preference this, the spirit of my grandfather and all his Shakespearean work, of father and his lifelong association with Old English Comedy asserting itself. The dresses, reproduction of historical castles and houses, actual visits to certain of them; the careful attention that must be paid not only to apparel, but to the manners and customs of the period also; all these are reasons for my preference for the costume film.

Where do I like it? Under the auspices of a kind and encouraging management. I would like to underline that word *encouraging*, for I have sometimes worked for

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companies whose policy was "Never encourage your artists, never allow them to believe you think well of them." To my mind this is a very mistaken one and not conducive to the best results. I must confess to a liking for being comfortable as a second answer to the "where" query. For several films it was my fate, and the fate of all the artists with me, to dress in old Army huts. Like all well-behaved huts they were not built on rock, and their foundations were not of a damp-resisting variety; the open gas jet is a charming relic of bygone days but not conducive either to light or warmth. Then I have an old-fashioned affection for a wardrobe—or at least a few hooks on the wall for my dresses during a film—but no, a shelf round the walls of the hut was evidently considered an adequate substitute for dressing table, chest of drawers and hanging cupboard. But I must in justice tell you that at the end of the fifth film for this company I was awarded a prize for good behaviour in the shape of a very old and dilapidated chest of drawers.

Why do I like it? Because it is so diffi-

cult : I remember my feelings of horror and despair when I saw myself in the first films I did. I looked wrong—I had made-up wrongly—I moved badly—my attempts at acting were a miserable failure, for I had not realized the difference in technique demanded by the silent drama ; photographically I was a shock ; as a screen artist I was a pity. I can't help wondering now why I did not retire at once in the face of such a crushing defeat. I suppose that mixed with my disgust at the sight of myself was a desire to do better, the optimism of youth must have whispered an encouraging word to me. It is possible that I tried to comfort myself subconsciously with the reflection that in these early films I speak of, all of us—artists, camera-men, producer, staff—seemed a little vague ; it was only a small company in its infancy, and maybe we all tried to run too soon. Be that as it may, truth compels me to admit that even so, my progress on the films was slow and painful. In a film called the *Labour Leader* I was very bad, and I had to ride a motor-cycle, and the thought of that just weighed me down

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throughout the whole film. As a mechanic I never was and never shall be any good, not even finding myself dressed in the most correct of motor cycling costumes nerved me to any display of confidence.

At last came a film in which I saw myself make some slight improvement. *Judge Not* it was called, but I was judging very severely ; the particular bit that pleased me was a shooting incident, not three or four but fourteen or fifteen times had we " shot " that shot, and my arm and neck had been spattered with gunpowder—but lo ! when the moment revealed itself upon the screen I betrayed no fatigue, discomfort or fear—feelings I had experienced and tried to hide, and for a wonder had succeeded. I was encouraged to listen still more attentively to that optimistic self which prompted me to go on trying.

Later on I was sent for by the Ideal Films Company—and I have always been at a loss to know why—to play the *Woman of No Importance* who, when she attained importance in the picture was a woman of forty ! I know I improved in that picture and I

know why: it was because I was directed by a very clever producer—Denison Clift. Whatever I have accomplished in the past is owing to him—whatever I manage to do in the future will be in a great measure owing to him. He taught me all I know of film technique, and a definite understanding of it that will enable me, I hope, to develop further. I was fortunate in making several pictures, all of them widely different in character, under his direction—*Old Wives Tale*, *Diana of the Crossways*, *Bill of Divorcement*, *This Freedom*, *The Loves of Mary Queen of Scots*.

Yes, because it is so difficult and therefore so interesting and intriguing, I like it, and because it is the same fascinating “make believe” and “let’s pretend” of the theatre, I like it.

Many times have people said to me that I must find the “realism” of the pictures a great assistance; the conversation in a wood—it really takes place under leafy boughs; the snowstorm episode is not assisted by salt or fragments of paper; real cold wet snow is provided; the walk across the moorland

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waste is not accomplished over boards covered with a curious matting—real cathedral walls inspired the devotion of that eccleciastical incident; the atmosphere of one of England's authentic stately homes permeated that argument between the Earl and his daughter, and so on *ad lib*. I am glad that the realism is not always so complete as to render the effort of make-believe unnecessary. After all the Earl is not really an earl, but Mr. So-and-so, and I am not his daughter—but “let's pretend” that he is and that I am. Do not let us heed that group of curious tourists that are edging up the aisle and doing their best to distract the attention of one seeking the solace of the church. Let's pretend it really is a cold day on this moor instead of being an extraordinarily hot one. What a pity that it would not snow in Paris—never mind, “make-believe” it is falling in the gay city and not in a corner of London. By all means must we imagine away the plague of gnats that bid fair to ruin a tender love scene.

I remember finding it very difficult to feel tenderly maternal to the little boy in

A Woman of No Importance, who had asked me to whom the car belonged in which we were driving, and when I replied "To me," had said, "Go on, story, it's the company's."

There was a moment on the Seine Bridge in Paris in the *Old Wives Tale* when it was difficult to remain stunned with grief, for I heard this conversation between two workmen. I was in the costume of the "Sixties" and wore a fair wig with ringlets and the usual pallid make-up. Said one to the other in a hoarse whisper: "Qu'est ce que c'est que ça?" Said the other, "Est ce qu'une femme?" "Non," replied the first, "ce n'est pas possible!"

In the love scene by the seashore in *Diana of the Crossways* my colleague, Henry Victor, and I, certainly heard the sound of the waves, but it was rather too harsh a sound; in the story a gentle plashing on the sands was all that broke the stillness of a sultry evening when Diana heard the passionate murmurs of devotion from the lips of her beloved and felt the fire of his caresses. We had to imagine the stillness of a summer evening and its languorous warmth—for at

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Kingsgate, where this scene was shot, it was blowing half a gale, the waves were dashing nosily on to the beach and Victor and myself were colder than any two human beings could hope to be again. We had great difficulty in preventing our teeth from chattering and ourselves from shivering noticeably.

In *This Freedom* my little boy (in the story) had to come to me, piteous, with a wounded finger and say, "Mummy, I've cut my finger!" The dear little fellow had all this explained, but short of really cutting his finger I don't think anything would have made him able to simulate distress; time after time he approached, and said in a most cheerful tone and with a most attractive smile, "Mummy, I've cut my finger!" He was so happy about it—the oftener he said it the happier he became. Finally there was nothing to do but give him glycerine tears and hope for the best.

And poor little James VI of Scotland, aged three, how he hated his kingship, how he loathed his mother; small wonder, poor darling, as the former involved his being



robed in stiff uncomfortable garments, and the mother was a woman with a dead-white face, a queer thing on her head and strange clothes—and withal she was crying, the tears were pouring down. Could he respond to her affection? No! "Take her away—I don't like her—no, no, go away," he moaned. I had indeed to make believe he loved me dearly. This was in *The Loves of Mary Queen of Scots*. Shall I ever forget the heat we endured during that film? (my favourite film), ninety degrees in the shade! What on earth it was in the studio under those lights, I can't think. It made the love scenes—between Gerald Ames as the Earl of Bothwell and me, he clothed in heavy armour and I in a weighty velvet robe, embarrassingly difficult; we poured with heat and grease paint. Not romantic.

Why do I like acting for the films? Another reason: because the whole industry in England is still in its infancy. I have been growing with it up to now, and rejoice in the thought that I may be allowed to develop with it as it develops. Artists have still much to learn and so have men of the

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camera, producers, distributors, exhibitors. May we hope that the time will come when there is as good a market—as high a price paid for the really good artistic British film—as there is for the foreign one, and that we may not hear it reported so often, that the English exhibitors have turned down a fine English film on the score that it is too good for “What the public wants.” One always longs for the poor public to have a chance of giving its own opinion as to its wants.

I have a very interesting remembrance of my first photograph as Mary Queen of Scots, taken by Dorothy Wilding, in the form of a letter from John Masefield, in which he says :—

“Thank you so much for your letter and for the beautiful surprise of your photograph. I thought the package was a manuscript poem for me to criticise, so what delight to find that it was you as the White Queen. I am delighted to have it. It is a most beautiful thing and I long to see you in the Film. It will be very jolly if I can some day do another play and have you in it.”

HOW? WHEN? WHERE?

I sincerely hope that Mr. Masfield's wish may one day come true.

I often wonder whether the public realizes how often we actors and actresses have to carry on with our work when we are feeling not just "a little out-of-sorts," but when we are downright ill, sometimes seriously so. It is not easy in these circumstances to make the necessary physical effort, but when it comes to the mental one and we are faced with having to play or film through what seems an endless day or night's work, it means undergoing a strain that is unbelievably hard. This has been my lot several times in my career; I remember very well for instance, during the taking of *Claude Duval*, being compelled on an icily cold winter's day, to ride away for hours in a damp wood, shivering like an aspen, and protected only by a very thin red velvetten riding-habit, pretending to myself that I had not really got a serious attack of 'flu, which was accompanied, of course, by a very high temperature. Very vivid in my mind too is another experience of illness while working, during particularly trying circumstances, for a sick

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person, for I was playing at night and filming all day. It was during the taking of *The Happy Ending*. I tried my hardest to finish the film without giving in, but in this instance nature proved the stronger. I had to give up and go into a nursing home to have an operation, finishing the film when I had recovered again. An adventure befell me during the taking of this same film ; it happened that in one of the scenes I had to paddle a canoe down a river. The director and his assistant were on a sort of floating landing-stage, and as I paddled near to them while the scene was being shot, I noticed that the landing-stage was being gradually submerged by the water. I didn't pay much attention to this, I confess, as the water was very shallow just there, and I was quite unprepared for what happened. Just as I was calmly thinking, "Surely they must know the water's up over that landing-stage," the whole thing collapsed ; the director and his assistant were flung well out into deep water and tried to save themselves by clinging to my canoe ! The next minute of course, I was in the river too, swimming

as high out of the water as I could possibly manage in order to save my hat from being ruined ; the thought of this calamity really worried me a good deal more than the very unexpected ducking we all had.

Everyone knows what a success Jack Buchanan made as a film actor, no less a one than in his own particular line of work on the stage. On this account I am very pleased to be able to take the credit of having been responsible for his most successful appearance as a film star. In casting *The Happy Ending*, the Gaumont Company were in difficulties as to whom they should get for the chief man's part. They could find nobody who was the type necessary and yet could play the part as they wished it played. Finally they asked me if I could think of anyone who would answer all their requirements, and I suggested Jack Buchanan, an idea which certainly proved a very excellent one.

I always think of *The Eleventh Commandment* with a feeling of guilt, because it was during this film that, for the first, and we'll hope for the last time, during a film or play,

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I took french leave. We were on locations at Knole Park. If you know this beautiful place surrounding a wonderful house, you will know that there is a famous three mile gallop in the Park. Now I happen to be very fond of riding. It was necessary that I should ride in some of the scenes shot at Knole Park. On the first day concerned with these riding scenes, out was led a very quiet, rather old horse, for me to do my day's work on. It was a most beautiful day—and no one there knew anything much about horses ! I thought of that three mile gallop and of what a pity it seemed not to take advantage of the gallop and the lovely day to ride for pleasure not for work, even though the horse was not a young and lively animal. I decided to risk any consequences that might ensue, and turning to the director with a worried face, I said in a worried voice " But this horse is *very* fresh," hoping that no one would know that he had been the reverse of fresh for some years. " I can't possibly ride him in these scenes without exercising him a bit, he'd cut up all over the place ! "

"Do you really think so, Miss Compton?" said the director, frightened at the thought of a possible accident.

"I'm sure of it; I must certainly exercise him for at least an hour," I said, and mounted and rode off. It was one of the nicest rides I've had, and no one found me out!

It was in *The Eleventh Commandment* too, that Stewart Rome and I had to drive in a car together. I had to do the driving, a thing I know very little about, loathe doing and am nervous of at any time. The director gave me special directions that for the purposes of reproduction on the screen it was most necessary I shouldn't exceed the speed of fifteen miles an hour. I told him that I should be far too busy concentrating on driving the car at all to be able to watch the speedometer, so Stewart was told to do this, and it was impressed upon him to tell me immediately we reached our limit of fifteen miles an hour so that I should not inadvertently drive faster. Off we went. The car was a powerful sports model with very rapid acceleration. As we progressed along the road we seemed

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to be going very quickly and I thought to myself that after all, fifteen miles an hour wasn't such a bad speed. I asked Stewart if I was by any chance exceeding the given limit, and he said, "Oh, no, not at all, you're well within it; keep her at just the speed you have her at now and you'll be quite all right." Just then I heard a faint, far-off cry of "Stop! Stop!" I slowed down and turned my head to see the director and his assistant like specks, far back on the road, who, when they finally reached us, indignantly asked me what I was thinking of, tearing along like that after all the directions I'd received! I assured them that Stewart had told me I was within my speed limit, and he backed me up, pointing to one of the many contrivances on the dashboard, stating emphatically in our defence that it had never gone up anywhere near fifteen. The director took one glance at the dial Stewart was pointing at, gave him a withering look and said, "You damn fool, that's the oil gauge!" We had been speeding along at somewhere about fifty miles an hour!

Settled Out of Court was an interesting film from my own personal point of view, for in it Leo made his first appearance on the screen as the villain of the piece, a sinister Russian gentleman, of whom he gave a very fine performance. It is often said of leading actresses that they do not like to share their success by being associated in the same play with other leading actresses. In our defence I would like to point out that this is not always the case. For instance, in *Settled Out of Court* the other leading woman's part was played by Jeanne de Casalis, whom I myself suggested should be engaged for it simply *because* I knew how extremely good she would be—so you see we are not always so ungenerous as is sometimes thought. A rather funny thing happened while this film was being taken. Some of the scenes had to be shot in the Temple. I have a barrister friend, who has his offices in the Temple, so one day when there was a little time to kill while some scenes I wasn't in were being shot, I thought I would go and see if he was in and have a chat with him till the director was ready to shoot the rest of my scenes ; so

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I walked along to his office, but he was out, and I sat down to wait. At this particular point in the film the character I was playing was in sad straits—she was ill, penniless and starving, and was dressed in very poor, deep black clothes. I had of course my film make-up on, not the usual yellow colour, but an almost dead white that I find suits me best for purposes of photography, and this was accentuated by deep shadows under the eyes to enhance the illusion of illness and starvation, so altogether I must have presented a sorry picture to anyone who was not expecting to see me at all, and who had seen me last a few weeks before, as my friend had done, in the best of health and spirits. I had quite forgotten that there was anything unusual in my appearance, and when he came up the stairs to his office, a few minutes after I'd arrived, I was amazed to see a look of the profoundest pity and sympathy come over his face at the sight of me—with outstretched hands he came towards me saying, "My dear Fay, what has happened? Can I do anything to help you? You must tell

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me all about it and we'll see what can be done ! ”

I said, “ You silly old fool, I'm *filming* ! ” He told me, when we'd stopped laughing, that at the sight of my pale drawn face and black clothes he thought that Leo must have died suddenly, leaving me a penniless widow and desperately ill into the bargain.

Speaking of clothes reminds me that it is sometimes extremely difficult to dress a part in *exactly* the right way. You try all sorts of different things and none of them seem to be really right for the particular idea you wish to convey. This happened to me in *London Love*. Try as I might I could not find the perfect clothes for the girl in this film, who starts her career as an East End factory girl with an instinct for dressing in the way that suits her best. It was getting very near the day we were to start filming and I was despairing of ever finding just the right clothes, when a great friend of mine looked in to see me one evening at the Haymarket. She had motored to town from the country and had on rather a jaunty but old tam o'shanter, with a jumper and skirt that

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matched the mood of the tammy. I took one look at her, saw the very things I'd hunted for in vain for the film, and said, "I'll have that tammy, *and* that jumper, *and* that skirt." She obediently surrendered them without a murmur there and then, borrowing things of mine to go home in ! I suppose if she had not come to see me that evening I should have had to play the part in clothes I knew were not *exactly* right—a most trying experience in either filming or acting.

CHAPTER XVIII

MARY ROSE COMES BACK

When the run of *Hamlet* ended, with one of those swift transitions I have already mentioned, I was transported from the deepest tragedy to the lightest comedy—Mr. A. A. Milne's *Ariadne*. There was certainly a strong sense of contrast in rehearsing this lady by day and playing Ophelia at night. To me it seemed a great pity that *Ariadne* was not a success. For its failure it is difficult to account, as it had, one thought, everything that a comedy should have to be successful. However, this was not the case in spite of its witty dialogue, clever characterization, the efforts of a most excellent cast, and all the care taken over rehearsals by Mr. E. Lyall Swete, the producer. Mr. Milne was often present at rehearsals and was very kind and charming to us all during what must be for an author the most trying of periods.

The Man with a Load of Mischief. I wonder if it is generally known that practically everyone who had anything to do with the

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production of this beautiful play prophesied that it would not run very long ! Not because they did not all unite in their admiration and enjoyment of its beauty, its haunting prose, its romance and poetic appeal, but just *because* of all these they were afraid the play would please only a minor section of the public, and that most of this often maligned body would not want to see it because it was too good, too rare. I believe I was almost the only person who thought all the time that it would be a success. I had a very strong feeling about this which persisted in spite of the discouraging outlook of nearly everyone else. Fortunately I was not wrong in my instinct, for what a tragedy it would have been if Mr. Ashley Dukes's beautiful play had gone the way of the unappreciated. I loved the part of The Lady, though I confess I found her difficult to play. Norman O'Neill rather complicated matters for me in this respect by writing two very lovely songs for The Lady which were extremely difficult to sing ! I was delighted when I heard that *The Man with a Load of Mischief* was to

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be produced at the Haymarket, for when the Stage Society produced it at one of their Sunday performances they asked me to play *The Lady*, and after reading the play I was naturally very disappointed that I was unable to do so because at that moment professional rehearsals were taking up my time, and thoroughly envied Leo who had been asked to play *The Man* and was able to do so. I have seldom been in a production which was so saturated with beauty. The prose, the scene, the music, all were beautiful, and the acting—Leo's performance of *The Man* and Frank Cellier's of *The Lord*—could not have been more in key with their surroundings or, in my opinion, bettered.

It was distressing to me that towards the end of the run I had to give up playing and go away for a rest. Months of acting, filming (and sometimes also rehearsing), simultaneously, had not only tired me out, but the continuous strain had affected my health very badly, and though I tried to argue with my doctor that it wouldn't do me much harm to go on playing for a while longer,

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he was not to be argued with, and insisted that I should go right away for several weeks for a rest and complete change. That being decided, the next thing to think about was where to go. Much to everybody's astonishment, I chose to go to New York ! Certainly, when I think of it now, New York does seem an odd place to choose for the purposes of resting, but there was the question of a "complete change," and I think I was justified in my choice on that score. I believe all my friends and relations expected to see me back from my New York holiday a complete wreck, far worse even than I was before I went. They evidently dreaded the effect of that most noisy and tiring city on one who had been ordered an entire rest. However, I enjoyed every minute going, coming back, and while I was there, and returned ever, ever so much better in spite of everyone's fears. I met some very interesting and charming people on the voyages, there and back, and in New York itself. Amongst them I renewed my acquaintance with Ethel Barrymore, Jack's brilliant and charming sister, who was play-



WITH MARK, ONE OF THE DOGS AT THE FARM

ing Ophelia at the time. Her performance, alas, I missed, through having two weeks only to see all that I wanted, which would have taken two years. I was extremely interested to meet several big film stars, including Richard Barthelmess. Also Glen Hunter, famous alike on the screen and stage. I think most English film-fans have seen his beautiful performance in *Merton of the Movies*. Writing of Dick Barthelmess, one day, having lunch with several English actors and actresses and American film workers in a rather low "dump" on Sixth Avenue near the latter's studio, Dick announced that he had to go to Sing Sing Prison that evening, and would anyone go with him? Most of them paid no attention and the others just said, "Don't be silly, Dick," or words to that effect. So I suggested myself, feeling intensely thrilled at the prospect of even going to prison with "Tol'able David." We had a lovely drive up the Hudson, and Sing Sing, though distinctly gloomy, proved to be very interesting.

When I had to sail home again my cabin

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on the *Mauretania* became a sort of super-green room, for I left at one o'clock in the morning, and all my theatrical friends, including Gertrude Lawrence, Beatrice Lillie, Auriol Lee, Ashley Dukes, Dick Barthelmess, Glen Hunter, Clifton Webb, Leslie Howard, Jack Buchanan, Noel Coward, Robert Andrews, and I can't remember how many more, all came along after their work to give me a cheery au revoir. I came back to play in the last few weeks of the run of *The Man with a Load of Mischief* in which Isabel Jeans had been playing my part most successfully while I was away. I was very sorry to say good-bye to *The Lady* when the run of the play came to an end, but how glad to welcome Mary Rose, who then came back again. Dear Mary Rose, how happy I was to be with you again, that you had indeed "come back" and that you would not "disappear" again in fact, as well as in fancy, until you and I had renewed our friendship and once more pledged vows of mutual affection.

The revival of *Mary Rose* was another new experience for me in that I had never

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before been in the revival of a play in which I had originally created one of the characters. I was a little doubtful whether the many other parts I had played, and consequently the greater experience of acting I had had since the play was first produced, would militate for or against my improvement in the second playing of *Mary Rose*. Nine times out of ten, granted that one is a sincere worker, the fact that one has had several years more experience of acting should undoubtedly help in playing any ordinary part a second time. But Mary Rose is not in any way an ordinary part, and I wondered whether I might have lost, through greater knowledge of the technicalities of acting, a simplicity which is essential to Mary Rose. I will admit that, though I was naturally conscious of the fact that I was five years older since the original production, I was genuinely surprised there should be such severe censure of me, by some of the critics, on the score of my increased age. Till my attention was drawn to the fact in this way, I must say that it had not occurred to me that to be five years older

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than when I first played the part was such a sin—now if it had been fifteen ! Several of the critics, however, seemed to take a more lenient view of the case and commended me for not having grown perceptibly older, so I was comforted and bore the weight of my five extra years less guiltily.

Most people I know, who are unconnected with the stage, congratulated me on the fact that I wouldn't have to learn again the words of Mary Rose ! They seemed to think that it would only be necessary for me to turn on a tap in my brain marked " M.R. " and out would gush the words. However, I was not so fortunate as that ; I had to learn every word of the part again, but sometimes in playing during the revival I felt as if I was back in the original production and had never played any other part since. There were several changes of cast. For instance, Mary Jerrold was out of England on a long tour of the Colonies. When I knew she would not be able to play my mother, I thought I should miss her dreadfully, and I did miss her, but with Hilda Trevelyan playing the part in her stead, how could I

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miss her "dreadfully"? Reginald Bach proved an admirable follower to Ernest Thesiger in the gillie's part, and Frank Cellier played charmingly the part created by the late Arthur Whitby. So really there were Jean Cadell, myself, and Norman Forbes of the original cast, but as Leo followed Robert Loraine quite early in the run of the first production, he seemed as much one of the "originals" as we did.

I remember a day during the rehearsals when I was brought to book in a characteristic way by Sir James Barrie, about a mannerism that I am always trying to overcome both on and off the stage. He took me aside and said very seriously, "Fay, if you look carefully through the script of *Mary Rose* you'll find a direction that says: 'It is essential that Mary Rose shall never once *wrinkle her brows* throughout the play'—I think you must have overlooked this the last time you played the part!" Needless to say there was no such direction in the script, and this was simply Sir James' way of reminding me of past misdemeanours,

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while guarding against fresh ones. In playing Mary Rose a second time I found the same difficulty I had before experienced in the last scene but one of the play. It will be remembered that during this scene all the characters, except Mary Rose—who does not come on till the scene is nearly finished—work *gradually* up to a very high pitch of emotion, but Mary Rose has to come on at this point, at exactly the same pitch of emotion as everyone else in the scene, without working up to it at all, and while she is on she only has three or four words to help her to convey her emotion. I always found this extremely difficult to do, and I was not helped one night in my efforts to get into the right spirit for making an entrance into the charged atmosphere of the scene, by hearing at my side one of the stage hands saying in a husky whisper: “I say, Miss Compton, do you remember ’ow difficult I used to find it to send you up on the wires, in *Peter Pan*?”

We noticed a curious thing about the revival of *Mary Rose*, which was that the stalls audience, the very section of the public

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to whom the first presentation of the play had most appealed, was the one to whom it did not appeal so markedly on its revival. We wondered whether, at the time of its first production soon after the war, people had got so used to having their emotions played upon, that in coming to see a serious play they *preferred* to be profoundly stirred, but whether now, when we are all trying to be happy, and stay happy, the majority of people do not wish to be so acutely distressed by a play as they undoubtedly are by *Mary Rose*. I don't think we who have acted in the play or those who have seen and loved it could analyse the *exact* effect it has on one, but that it is an intensely moving one is certain. I have often been asked if it was not a great strain on me to play Mary Rose night after night. Yes, unquestionably it was ; but I loved the part more than any I have ever played.

Again a strong contrast—Mr. Ben W. Levy's play, *This Woman Business*. It is still running as I write this, and as far as I can tell it is likely to be so by the time these reminiscences are published, for it has had a

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great success. After the demands made on one's emotions by a part like Mary Rose it is unquestionably a restful experience to play a comparatively small part in one of the wittiest and brightest plays I have ever acted in so far. All those who have seen the play will appreciate how splendidly the very amusing and diverse characters created by Mr. Levy are interpreted by their various actors, and I would like to say that I count it a privilege to be one of the cast of this clever play.

There is a very sad side to the run of *This Woman Business*, for not long after it commenced, Mr. Frederick Harrison, the much loved manager of the Haymarket Theatre, died. His death was sudden and quite unexpected. Only those of us who have had the happiness of playing at the Haymarket under his management will be able to realize what a gap his absence makes, how much he is missed, and how the theatre that was his joy as well as his pride, seems to mourn him. I am sure there has rarely been a kinder, more just or more courteous manager than Frederick Harrison. His

